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Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program

CTX: Combating Terrorism Exchange

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# CTX

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## From the Editor

Welcome to the May issue of the *Combating Terrorism Exchange*. This issue is unusual not for its length—although it is by far the longest issue we’ve yet produced—but because in it we offer you two main articles that describe in exceptional detail the “Anbar Awakening” in Iraq (2004–6), from very different points of view. The backstory for both accounts begins when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s violent jihadi group al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had infested the Al Qaim district of Anbar after fleeing Fallujah. Having presented themselves as freedom fighters, the militants were now beginning to show their true intent, using killings and coercion to keep the locals in line with their radical al Qaeda agenda. Although most of the Anbar tribes opposed the U.S.-led occupation, once the sheikhs realized that AQI was working to undermine their authority, they had a change of heart, and the *Sahawa* (Awakening) was born.

Dr. William Knarr and his team of researchers at the U.S. Institute for Defense Analysis concentrate on the U.S. Marine battalions deployed to the Al Qaim district to fight AQI. Through extensive archival research and first-person interviews with a significant number of Iraqi and American participants, Knarr and his team describe how the Marines, initially wary and suspicious after a year of hard fighting, came to embrace the Awakening and, working with the sheikhs and their people, pushed back against AQI to free the Al Qaim district from the jihadists’ grip. We are urged to see the events in Al Qaim as the earliest manifestation of a wave of counterterrorist revolt that culminated in the battle for Ramadi and the decimation of AQI in western Iraq.

MAJ Brent Lindeman, U.S. Army Special Forces, then takes us through these events from the quite different perspective of two Special Forces team sergeants, whom he calls William and Robert. Lindeman’s is a firsthand account of the slow, painstaking work these men put into understanding the complex, sensitive, and perpetually shifting relationships among local power brokers, and what they did to leverage their understanding into achieving cooperation and then success. Through Lindeman’s eyes we get an unusually clear picture of the many personalities involved on all sides of the table. He describes with sharp insight and occasional ironic humor the negotiations and machinations that brought the tribes and the teams together to beat back their deadly mutual enemy.

The Indian government, by contrast, has made less conclusive progress against an indigenous insurgency that has festered for decades. How do you solve a problem like the Maoists? Group Captain Srinivas Ganapathiraju of the Indian Air Force offers us some CT solutions that, perhaps unsurprisingly, are not too different from those described by Knarr and Lindeman. Foremost is the need for the central government to actually follow through on its promises



to improve the lives of its long-neglected rural population. Then, the author advises, New Delhi must develop a broad-based strategy to both exploit the Maoists' structural vulnerabilities at the political level, and target their hardcore leadership via dedicated Special Operations Forces.

From the present situation on the Indian subcontinent, we move to Yemen in 2001, when MAJ Mohammed Garallah, a newly minted young army officer, was among the first cadre of Yemeni soldiers to be trained by American SOF in counterterrorism. Unfortunately, mutual cross-cultural misunderstandings doomed that initial effort to, if not failure, then a very qualified success. The best intentions of the American trainers and the willingness of their Yemeni pupils, Garallah explains with keen irony, could not make up for each side's misguided expectations of the other.

We are pleased to introduce a new feature in this issue. Global ECCO's Combating Terrorism Archive Project (CTAP) is devoted to collecting interviews with CTFP alumni from around the world, who share their experiences, knowledge, and insights for the benefit of their peers and successors in the CT community. This issue's excerpt is from an interview with Canadian Army Engineer MAJ Nils N. French. In it he describes how his two years as an instructor at the U.S. Army Engineering School, Fort Leonard Wood, prepared him to work effectively with his American EOD counterparts in Afghanistan in 2009. English may have been a common language, French explains, but, he found he had to translate "a whole bunch of U.S. terms ... into Canadian." Even between close neighbors, cross-cultural misunderstandings can raise problems.

Prof. Rebecca Johnson of the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College writes our Ethics and Insights column. Asked by the field grade officers who are her students what they can do to maintain an ethical command climate when deployments take their units far from base, Dr. Johnson emphasizes the importance of setting and maintaining high expectations. A good leader embodies commitment to the mission, demonstrates the ability and willingness to control his or her actions, and accepts adversity as a challenge, not an impediment, to personal and group development.

In his State of the Art column, LT Edval Zoto, Albanian Army, casts a discerning eye on the gap between what author Max Boot told an NPS audience during a presentation about his ambitious new book, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright, 2013), and what the painting that is on the cover of his book actually represents. Boot thinks one thing, Soto another. What the disparity boils down to, Soto concludes, is the need to articulate a clear definition of guerrilla warfare, something Boot, in Soto's opinion, doesn't do.

Finally, we welcome back the sharp pen of Dr. Kalev Sepp, who takes on the Hollywood blockbuster *Zero Dark Thirty* in this issue's movie review. The film purports to tell the story of the hunt for Osama bin Laden, but Sepp warns, don't imagine what you see bears any resemblance to the truth. In the end, *Zero Dark Thirty*, with its profanity-laden dialogue and absurd depictions of CIA tradecraft, insults just about every real-life person who had a hand in the destruction of bin Laden.

Now I'm calling on you, the CTX community, to write to me at [CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org) and tell me what you think about this and past issues of CTX. Did you serve in Anbar during the Awakening? Do you have yet a different point of view to offer? Or maybe you liked *Zero Dark Thirty* .... We are going to start publishing some of your feedback in a Letters to the Editor section, so write to me and get the discussion going!

## ELIZABETH SKINNER

Managing Editor

This issue was in production on 15 April, when terrorist bombs struck the Boston Marathon, killing three. On that same day, dozens of people died from car and roadside bombs across Iraq. Our thoughts are with all of terrorism's victims, their families and friends, and with responders, including you. Thanks for the work you do to combat terrorism.

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## About the Contributors

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**Gp Capt Srinivas Ganapathiraju** is an Indian Air Force fighter pilot. He is a qualified flight instructor and has earned a MS in Defense and Strategic studies at the Defense Services Staff College in India. He was selected for promotion to Group Captain (equivalent to Colonel), and following graduation was assigned as the Chief Operations Officer for one of India's premier air bases.

**MAJ Mohammed A. Garallah** serves as a senior operations officer in the Yemeni SOF command. He currently is completing a MS in the DA Dept. at NPS. MAJ Garallah has commanded at the platoon and company levels, and served a two-and-a-half year tour in Darfur, Sudan as part of UNAMID (African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur).

**Dr. Rebecca J. Johnson** is Associate Professor of National Security Affairs at the Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University. Her chapter, "The Moral Formation of the Strategic Corporal" appears in P. Tripodi and J. Wolfendale, eds., *New Wars and New Soldiers: Military Ethics in the Contemporary World* (Ashgate, 2012). She

also has contributed to B.J. Strawser and Jeff McMahon, eds., *Killing By Remote Control* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013).

**Dr. William (Bill) Knarr** is a resident Senior Fellow at the Joint Special Operations University. He was working as a project leader at the Institute for Defense Analyses when this article for CTX was written. Co-author Ms. Mary Hawkins is an analyst at IDA. The rest of the IDA Project Team are: Col Dale Alford, USMC, LtCol David Graves, USMC, MajGen Tom Jones, USMC (Ret.), Jennifer Goodman, Chris Ploszaj, Col Tracy King, USMC, John Frost, Munther Saiegh, Carolyn Leonard, Alan Leonard, and Matt Coursey.

**Major Brent Lindeman** is a United States Army Special Forces officer and graduate of NPS, with a MS degree from the DA Dept. His undergraduate degree is in political science from Texas Christian University. He has four deployments to Iraq with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and is currently assigned to 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) as a company commander.

**LT Edval Zoto**, Albanian Army, is enrolled in the Special Operations curriculum, DA Dept. at NPS. He graduated in 2009 from the University of Turin in Strategic, Political and Organizational Sciences, and earned a MA degree in International Relations from the University of Business and International Studies, Geneva and the ISSAT Institute, Tirana in 2011.

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### COVER PHOTO

Shiite and Sunni members of the Joint Security Committee (JSC) attend the First Anbar-Kabala JSC Meeting in Ramadi, Iraq, Oct. 20, 2007. Members attend the gathering in honor of newly appointed Anbar Awakening Council Chief, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Reesha. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Sarah Furrer/Released)

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## Al-Sahawa: An Awakening in Al Qaim

ON 2 MAY 2005, CHIEF OF POLICE MAJOR AHMED ADIYA ASAF WAS WALKING along Main Street in the market area of Husaybah, a town in the Al Qaim district of northwestern Iraq, when seven men attacked, shot, and beheaded him.<sup>2</sup> For the people of the Albu-Mahal tribe, the beheading of MAJ Ahmed was the last straw. The Albu-Mahal became the first tribe to stage a significant uprising against AQI.

More than a year later, on 14 September 2006, Sheikh Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha announced the *Sahawa*—the Awakening.<sup>3</sup> On that day, Sheikh Sattar and 40 other sheikhs from the Ramadi area signed an Emergency Council proclamation to work with the Multi-National Force–Iraq (hereafter the Coalition forces) to drive al Qaeda from Al Anbar province.

Most people associate the Anbar Awakening movement with Sheikh Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha's 14 September 2006 announcement, because on that day he coined the term *Sahawa*. The historical association of that event with the Awakening was made even more dramatic by the fact that three days before the announcement, a secret military assessment leaked to the press had proclaimed Al Anbar to be “militarily unwinnable.” More importantly, the subsequent Ramadi awakening happened quickly. One year after Sheikh Sattar's announcement, U.S. President George W. Bush met with him, the tribal leaders of Al Anbar, and the leadership of Iraq to congratulate them on their successes. On 1 September 2008, conditions were stable enough to hand over the province to the Iraqis.

Few people, however, connect events and relationships between the events in Al Qaim in 2005 and the Ramadi uprising in 2006.<sup>4</sup> Although historians recognize Al Qaim's Albu-Mahal tribe as one of the first to rise against AQI, they tend to portray the events in Al Qaim as unrelated to, and greatly overshadowed by, later events in Ramadi.<sup>5</sup> To the contrary, Al Qaim's revolt against AQI was part of a continuous story line, precursory to events in Ramadi, and one of the critical enablers of the Anbar Awakening movement.<sup>6</sup> What is more, Al Qaim's *Sahawa* was one of the first examples of successful COIN operations in Al Anbar and Iraq—long before FM 3-24 was lauded as revolutionary new COIN doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Although the term *Sahawa*, the Anbar Awakening movement, would not be coined until 16 months later, some would say it came into being on 2 May 2005, in Al Qaim.

### Background

The Al Qaim district in Al Anbar province became increasingly important to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group al Qaeda in Iraq after November 2004, when AQI lost its sanctuary to the Coalition forces' onslaught in the second battle

*Dr. William Knarr, Joint Special Operations University<sup>1</sup>*

This was an IDA project team effort, as reflected in the list of team members below.

IDA Project Team: Mary Hawkins, Col Dale Alford, USMC, LtCol David Graves, USMC, MajGen Tom Jones, USMC (Ret.), Jennifer Goodman, Chris Ploszaj, Col Tracy King, USMC, John Frost, Munther Saiegh, Carolyn Leonard, Alan Leonard, Matt Coursey

*Al Qaim's Sahawa was one of the first examples of successful COIN operations in Al Anbar and Iraq.*

With the loss of Fallujah, Al Qaim became AQI's newfound sanctuary, its proclaimed caliphate.

of Fallujah, called Operation Al Fajr. The Al Qaim district is located on Iraq's border with Syria. Although the district's population of 150,000–200,000 represents only 10 percent of the province's population, the area is strategically important due to its location on the border and along the Euphrates River.<sup>8</sup> Al Qaim is along a lucrative smuggling route for black market goods, and was AQI's lifeline to Baghdad as foreign fighters, money, and other resources that fueled the insurgency infiltrated Iraq. With the loss of Fallujah, Al Qaim also became AQI's newfound sanctuary, its proclaimed caliphate.

AQI arrived in Al Qaim with offers to partner with the district's tribes to defeat the U.S.-led Coalition forces. Its leaders promised money and other resources, while declaring that as Muslims and Arabs, Al Qaim residents were obligated to conduct jihad, to fight the "crusaders." The Coalition, ignorant of tribal customs, religion, and traditions, had, many local people felt, disrespected and dishonored the people of Al Qaim, and a patriotic resistance movement had already formed there. Initially, the tribes of Al Qaim saw the al Qaeda movement as the "complete jihad."<sup>9</sup> For many residents, it was time to rid the area of the occupiers. They believed that together, they—AQI, the tribes, and their militias—could do that.

The tribes of the region varied in size and available resources, and were incapable of defeating the U.S. occupiers on their own. Some, like the Albu-Mahal tribe, the strongest tribe in the area, organized and gave resources to the Hamza Battalion specifically to fight the Coalition.<sup>10</sup> Even with the support of the tribal militia, however, the Albu-Mahals lacked the weaponry, ammunition, and other equipment to win such a fight. AQI's offer of support was tempting, and most of the tribes accepted.

But AQI's offer was deceptive; it was not a partnership they proposed. AQI provided weaponry and funding, but it also demanded to lead the jihad with the intent of first destroying and then transforming the social fabric of Al Qaim. AQI started by taking over the smuggling routes, skimming profits, and killing those who resisted. It then imposed a radical form of Islamic law, or shari'a, in the district with fanatical punishments for transgressors. AQI used religion to justify such actions, which included forced marriages of local women to its fighters.<sup>11</sup> The most common intimidation tactic was to behead those who resisted and to leave the head on the chest of the body in the street for all to see. Sometimes only the head was left and the body was disposed of in the river or in the *jazeera*—the desert. Despite the risk of brutal retribution, there were dissenters among the tribes, particularly within the Albu-Mahal in Husaybah, the small Iraqi border town that served as Al Qaim's main market and port of entry. AQI needed to show it was in charge; it could not afford dissenters or challengers. The most visible challenge to its authority was the Coalition's Camp Gannon, located in the northwest corner of Husaybah.<sup>12</sup>

"This will be a victory in which we free Iraq from the American oppressors."

## The Attack on Camp Gannon

This is going to be a great attack against the Americans. This will be a victory for Allah. This will be a victory against the coalition, and this will be a victory in which we free Iraq from the American oppressors.<sup>13</sup>



Camp Gannon, constructed adjacent to the old border station between Syria and Iraq, had become a reviled icon of the occupation. AQI needed a victory against such an icon for psychological as well as practical reasons. First, AQI needed to show the tribes of the area that it was in charge of the region, and Camp Gannon was a constant reminder of the Coalition's permanent presence. Second, although Camp Gannon's reach along the border was limited, it severely restricted the insurgents' ability to move foreign fighters and other support into Iraq. Finally, as Camp Gannon restricted the flow of goods and resources from Syria, it accounted for a loss of monthly revenue to the insurgents.

In the early morning on 11 April 2005, its enemies greeted Camp Gannon with two rounds of mortar fire. That was normal. India Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines (3/2), had been receiving a daily fare of mortar rounds at Camp Gannon since it arrived in February, as had its predecessor, Baker Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (1/7). What was not normal was the sophistication of the follow-on attack—a trademark of AQI.<sup>14</sup>

Three suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED), preceded by a breaching vehicle and followed by a film crew/media van, penetrated Camp Gannon's defensive barriers and targeted its inner sanctum, the command post. Captain Frank Diorio, company commander, India Company, who had been knocked down by successive blasts, heard someone yell, "Fire truck!" The fire truck was the last and largest of the three SVBIEDs.<sup>15</sup> "My heart sank," Capt Diorio later recalled. "I heard the explosion. I thought it was a direct hit on my CP [command post]. ... I thought I'd lost about 150 Marines" (see Figure 1). Immediately after the last blast, Capt Diorio heard incoming fire—small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and machine guns—from houses adjacent to Camp Gannon. Foreign fighters had infiltrated the area the night before, vacated the residents, and staged for the assault and exploitation of the SVBIED attack. Within minutes of the incoming fire, Capt Diorio heard outgoing fire and saw lieutenants and noncommissioned officers moving to positions and supplying Marines at their posts. Miraculously, as each platoon accounted for its Marines, Diorio realized that none had been lost; they had repelled the attack.

Within 24 hours, the insurgents posted the video announcing the attack as "a victory for Allah ... a victory against the coalition ... a victory in which we free Iraq from the American oppressors."<sup>17</sup> The townspeople quickly learned, however, that the Coalition had lost no forces. To save face, the foreign fighters announced over the mosque loudspeakers that the "Americans didn't die because you [the townspeople of Husaybah] are bad Muslims ... or else we would have had victory."<sup>18</sup>

The people of Husaybah didn't buy the propaganda. One night soon after the attack, the Marines heard gunshots coming from the Market Place. They called a local source, dubbed the "City Lady," who resided in or around Husaybah, and asked her what was happening. "Well, there was a fight in the Market Place between the foreign fighters and a local. The local is making fun of them for not killing any of you guys. And the foreign fighters shot and killed him," she told them. This was Capt Diorio's first indication that something was going on that the Marines might be able to influence. He explained, "There was no inclination that they [locals] liked us ... but they were making fun of the foreign fighters ... [so maybe it was something] we can use."<sup>19</sup>

"My heart sank," Capt Diorio later recalled. "I thought I'd lost about 150 Marines."



Figure 1: SVBIED at Camp Gannon<sup>16</sup>

The beheading of MAJ Ahmed proved to be the last straw. Some would say the *Sahawa* began that day.

Although this may have been the Marines' first sense of a rift between the tribes and AQI, trouble had been building for months. To protect their equities and control the population, AQI had not been allowing the tribes to arm and protect themselves. Security in Al Qaim, and in particular, in Husaybah, had become untenable. The Albu-Mahal appointed one of their own, Major Ahmed Adiya Asaf, as the new chief of police.<sup>20</sup>

On 2 May 2005, MAJ Ahmed was walking along Main Street in the market area of Husaybah when seven men attacked, shot, and beheaded him.<sup>21</sup> AQI was publically reinforcing its earlier declaration that AQI—not the tribes of Al Qaim—would be in charge of security, and that it would not tolerate competition of any sort. The beheading of MAJ Ahmed proved to be the last straw. The Albu-Mahal became the first tribe to openly revolt against AQI. Some would say the *Sahawa* began that day.<sup>22</sup>

### The Albu-Mahal Reject Al Qaeda in Iraq

The change was swift. On the same day MAJ Ahmed was killed, the Albu-Mahal's Hamza Battalion turned on AQI and AQI's local supporters, tribes such as the Karbuli and the Salmani. The militia that was created to fight Coalition forces changed course and led the Albu-Mahals into their first major battle against foreign and local insurgents.<sup>23</sup>

The ferocity of AQI's reaction to the Albu-Mahal's challenge, and the tribe's realization of the magnitude of the consequences should they fail, prompted Albu-Mahal members to call upon the Coalition for help. Former Governor of Al Anbar province Fasal al-Gaoud contacted Americans at Camp Fallujah on behalf of the Albu-Mahals.<sup>24</sup> Al Gaoud was a member of the Albu-Nimr tribe, a tribe that shares ancestry as well as history with the Albu-Mahal.<sup>25</sup> The Albu-Nimrs are the dominant tribe in Hit, a town northwest of Ramadi. In addition to Al Gaoud's call for help, Albu-Mahal leadership called Bruska Nouri Shaways, Iraqi deputy minister of defense, requesting the Coalition forces' support.<sup>26</sup> These early contacts were promising, but the potential would become lost in the chaos of what seemed to the Coalition to be a case of a "red-on-red" struggle for power.

On 10 May, AQI kidnapped Al Anbar Governor Nawaf Farhan, a member of the Albu-Mahal tribe and cousin of Sheikh Sabah, the Albu-Mahal's paramount sheikh. Governor Nawaf had attempted to reconcile the conflict in Al Qaim, but found himself a pawn in AQI's campaign to intimidate the tribes into compliance. By kidnapping him, AQI had again gone too far. This act only further infuriated the Mahalawis<sup>27</sup> and strengthened their resolve against AQI.

In the midst of the conflict between AQI and the Albu-Mahal, Regimental Combat Team (RCT)-2 launched Operation Matador on 7 May. The operation, planned before the fighting broke out between AQI and the Albu-Mahal, was designed to disrupt terrorist activities in the Al Qaim region.<sup>28</sup> The twin offensives against AQI, the Albu-Mahal's Hamza Battalion's and RCT-2's, were separate and uncoordinated. They both targeted the same enemy, but in different areas: the Albu-Mahal attack came primarily in Husaybah to the west and south of the river, and RCT-2's in the east near Ubaydi and north of the river to the border (see Figure 2).

The militia that was created to fight Coalition forces changed course and led the Albu-Mahals against [the] insurgents.



Figure 2: Al Qaim Area

Residents who had fled during Operation Matador returned to find destroyed homes and fellow tribesmen, some of whom had remained to support the Coalition, dead. Fasal al-Gaoud complained that the Coalition forces did not discriminate between AQI fighters and the growing number of anti-AQI tribesmen.<sup>29</sup> On-the-ground Coalition forces, still unaware of any request by the Albu-Mahal for help and unable to discriminate among what they considered to be all red forces, claimed success in clearing insurgent areas. While the Coalition acknowledged that locals had provided intelligence information to support the assault, they remained dubious of local efforts to work with the Coalition in the fight.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the confusion, the Albu-Mahal's Hamza Battalion cleared Husaybah and pushed AQI to the east into Karabilah, a town south of the Euphrates populated by the Karbuli tribe, an AQI supporter.<sup>31</sup> With Husaybah cleared, the Albu-Mahals began reconstructing damaged sections of the city and established tribal security around critical infrastructure such as government buildings and services. According to COL Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, future leader of the Desert Protectors, remaining pockets of AQI seemed to dissipate throughout June and July from areas around Husaybah, as the jihadist group moved east toward Rawah.<sup>32</sup>

RCT-2 and, in particular, 3/2 Marines recognized insurgent forces who were seeking sanctuary in the Karabilah area. Specifically, during Operation Matador, insurgent forces north of the Euphrates fled southwest across the "Golden Gate" bridge to find sanctuary in Karabilah. Additionally, the Karbuli tribe that resided in Karabilah joined forces with AQI against the Albu-Mahal and the Coalition. On 15 June, RCT-2 executed Operation Spear, which aimed to root out AQI and disrupt its support systems.<sup>33</sup> According to Colonel Timothy Mundy, commander, 3/2, the fighting against insurgents wasn't heavy, but it was steady as Coalition forces cleared houses and moved



“[W]e found what we referred to as the torture house and several guys in there still in handcuffs.”

north toward the Euphrates. The significance of the operation was in the intelligence find:

We found papers, a computer with a big database of people that had come through, passports of all sorts from different countries, weapons stockpiles, and a school room with a chalkboard drawing out how to build IEDs. It was a class for IED building... [W]e found what we referred to as the torture house ... and several guys in there still in handcuffs. They had scars all over their bodies. There was one room in the house [with] ... a big hook in the ceiling and they would obviously run these guys up, hang them upside down over a bucket of water. They would dip them in the water and then pull them up. They had a frayed electrical cord plugged into the wall that they would sit there and shock them. They had burns and marks all over their bodies. There was very obvious foreign fighter involvement there in terms of the types of weapons ... all sorts of different makes of RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] and rifles.<sup>34</sup>

### Al Qaeda Returns with a Vengeance

[U]nder the guise of negotiations, AQI gathered thousands of fighters into the Al Qaim area.

The Albu-Mahal's struggle with AQI was far from over. During June and most of July, under the guise of negotiations, AQI gathered thousands of fighters from Mosul, Diyala, Baghdad, and Salah ad-Din into the Al Qaim area. On 25 July 2005, after nearly two months of building its forces, AQI returned with a vengeance. Injured in earlier fighting in the Al Qaim district, Zarqawi, the leader of AQI, took a personal interest in this operation. Within four days, thousands of AQI fighters, heavily outnumbering the 300–400 Albu-Mahal fighters, attacked and killed 60 tribal members. They also destroyed 41 family homes by detonating each house's propane tank, including that of Sheikh Sabah.<sup>35</sup>

AQI attacked from three directions: from the Syrian border area in the west, from across the Euphrates River in the north, and from the east; the only route of escape open to the Albu-Mahal fighters was to the south. The Mahalawis, outnumbered and out of ammunition, fled for their lives. Most sought refuge with other tribal members in Akashat, 100 miles to the south of Al Qaim. Some travelled to Sufia, east of Ramadi, to stay with tribal brethren. Those who could afford to fled to Syria or Jordan.<sup>36</sup>

“[O]ur children, our women, old men, are all surrounded and the terrorists are going to kill them all.”

Afraid for his tribe, Sheikh Sabah, from his refuge in Jordan, contacted Iraqi Minister of Defense Dr. Sadun Dulaymi and, according to Sadun, told him, “We need help, because our children, our women, old men, are all surrounded and ... the terrorists are going to kill them all.” Upon learning this, Coalition Commander General George Casey dispatched an airplane to transport Sheikh Sabah from Amman to Baghdad. According to Sadun, a small group then “met together in my office and put together a plan to help the people of Al Qaim, not just the Albu-Mahal tribe, but all the people of Al Qaim.”<sup>37</sup>

In Al Qaim, prospects were grim for those who remained. The Mahalawis were no longer worried about AQI skimming profits or imposing a harsh social code. It was now a question of surviving. As predicted by Sheikh Sabah, AQI continued its murder and intimidation campaign against those Mahalawis

who could not flee. On the ground, Capt Diorio was getting regular updates from contacts in Husaybah. He recalled, “Foreign fighters gathered to come kill my contact [Ali], my source, his family, and his immediate tribe [Albu-Mahal].”<sup>38</sup> He also received a phone call from the City Lady, another contact, who told him that about 250 insurgents were at the palace in Husaybah.<sup>39</sup> “At the same time,” Capt Diorio said, “there [was] a lot of rhetoric that Zarqawi himself was coming to lead this, because he was annoyed by this Sunni tribe rising up against another Sunni tribe.”

The information, corroborated through other sources, started to gain traction, and Capt Diorio received approval for an air strike on the palace; at least 100 were killed. This angered AQI and prompted it to bring in more fighters to complete the assault on the Albu-Mahal. The fighters moved into the largest hotel in Husaybah, the yellow hotel with 50–60 rooms. Capt Diorio received another call from the City Lady, and he recalled her saying, “The guys who survived that other strike and a lot of guys who came in from out of town... [T]here are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these guys in the hotel.”<sup>40</sup>

Again, other sources verified the information. In the meantime, the Albu-Mahal were split between the northern part and southeastern part of the city. Now minute-by-minute updates were coming in from contacts in the area; according to Capt Diorio:

We were getting frantic phone calls: “We’re getting run over.” And then perhaps the most surreal moments ... we saw in the hundreds, Iraqis come out of the north end of the city towards our OP [outpost] ... with their hands up. They are now coming in full daylight out of the city towards our OP with their hands up. Ali, our contact, was calling us saying, “These are my people; please help them. We’re getting killed.”

This was a true turning point as the Albu-Mahal turned to the Marines for help. Capt Diorio continued: “To watch them openly see us as their help, as their rescuers, in broad daylight with their hands up, was amazing. To me, that was the point where the entire city, the foreign fighters, [and] AQI saw the Albu-Mahals say, the Marines are our help. And they came in droves.”

At this point, the Marines understood exactly what was happening. They knew this was a significant moment and, as Capt Diorio described, were ready to support it: “And again, talk about discipline. I had Marines now who at this point had fought over 300 fire fights and had faced the largest attack against a Coalition base. They’d been through a lot, and they withheld their fire in a real display of discipline. They read the people.”

But the Marines also understood that there was a high probability that some bad guys were hiding within this group of Mahalawis, so they were cautious and responded accordingly. Until they could sort things out, they told the approaching people, “We’re going to treat you like we would treat any other prisoner right now.” One of the people approaching the Marine outpost said, “I understand, and they [motioning to the others in the group] know it.” So, the Marines handcuffed and blindfolded the Mahalawis to sort them out when the situation stabilized.

The Marines understood this was a significant moment and were ready to support it.



Capt Diorio's Marines perceived the Mahalawis' cries for help as positive, and were anxious to defend the tribe.

At this point, the Marines were processing approximately 60 Mahalawis as detainees. Capt Diorio began worrying that the situation was worsening when he continued to receive troubled phone calls from Ali's family. At one point, one of them said, "We're going to die. We're getting crushed." Capt Diorio thought, "Hey, it was great that it worked for a while, but is this going bad now?"

But again, Capt Diorio's Marines understood and responded. They perceived the Mahalawis' cries for help as positive, and they were anxious to defend the tribe. At that point, Capt Diorio described the situation as "bigger than us [himself and his Marines]." He explained:

[T]here was buy-in from the Marines ... Colonel Mundy was involved. Colonel Davis was involved. The division was involved. They were all read into what was going on. They were sending up the request for airstrikes.

A Coalition airstrike destroyed the hotel, saving Ali and his family. Surviving members of Ali's tribe evacuated south to Akashat. But Husaybah was lost. AQI came in with the Salmani, another local pro-AQI tribe, and took over the town, making life unbearable for those who remained. This happened at the same time that 3/2 Marines conducted a relief in place with 3/6 Marines. Capt Diorio later recalled his parting thoughts:

I think what we were left with was an initial thought that this failed. Then as we continued to think about it, we thought that this is the tipping point that every counterinsurgency needs. This is the tipping point that you now have a Sunni tribe, Albu-Mahal, who to the point of their very own lives, sided with Coalition forces, sided with India Company, sided with the Marine Corps.

Husaybah was lost. AQI took over the town, making life unbearable for those who remained.

Capt Diorio may have identified the tipping point with the benefit of hindsight, but when asked what he would have done had he remained, he responded, "I honestly think that we probably couldn't have seen what we needed to see because of what we had gone through." It was time for a turnover, time for a fresh set of eyes to work the problem.

Psychologically, the Albu-Mahal may have tipped, but physically, they no longer resided in Al Qaim. By 5 September, Zarqawi reportedly controlled the region and posted signs to that effect.<sup>41</sup> Despite the long list of Coalition transgressions and a deep mistrust of the Government of Iraq (GOI),<sup>42</sup> AQI's savage and uncompromising trajectory toward fanaticism convinced the Albu-Mahals that siding with the Coalition and GOI was a more palatable alternative to misery and death. AQI gave the Coalition and GOI an opportunity to change the balance in their favor and under their terms.

## Changing the Balance

In February 2005, RCT-2 took responsibility for Area of Operation (AO) Denver, which included Al Qaim and four adjacent districts. RCT-2 had an economy of force mission to "conduct counterinsurgency operations in order to disrupt and interdict anti-Iraq elements."<sup>43</sup> Its objective, in line with Multi-National Force–Iraq objectives, was to support a successful

national referendum in October and national elections in December 2005. RCT-2's approach was to conduct one or two major operations a month in the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV), and to "disrupt and interdict anti-Iraqi elements," both of which were tall orders for a small force. RCT-2 had 3,200 Marines and Sailors deployed in a 30,000-square-mile battlespace, to confront an enemy infiltrating from a porous border to the west and fleeing from a lost sanctuary in Fallujah to the east. They were the "little RCT with a division mission and a MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force] battle space."<sup>44</sup> By any objective measure, RCT-2's goal to "establish combined, permanent, persistent presence in major population centers in the WERV" could not be accomplished with its assigned force structure.<sup>45</sup>

They were the "little RCT with a division mission and a MEF battle space."

But what started as 3,200 Marines and Sailors on an economy of force mission in February 2005, grew to 14,000 U.S. Marine, U.S. Army, and Iraqi Security Forces personnel by September 2005.<sup>46</sup> Army Special Forces teams also redeployed into the area, with the primary mission of foreign internal defense: to work with indigenous Iraqis to help them secure their own areas.<sup>47</sup> Major Martin Adams, Special Forces company commander, deployed an ODB (Operational Detachment Bravo) to Al Asad to work with RCT-2 and to support the recently deployed Special Forces' outlying operational detachments: Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 582 in Al Qaim, ODA 555 in Hadithah, and ODA 545 in Hit.

Captain Jim Calvert, commanding ODA 582,<sup>48</sup> arrived in Al Qaim in August 2005, about the same time that the Mahalawis were fleeing AQI. CPT Calvert's mission was broad and nebulous: Make life better for the Iraqis. Calvert recalled the conditions on his arrival at Camp Gannon as far from optimal: "We got hit with about everything the insurgents had—small arms, machine gun, rocket-propelled grenades, mortar fire—it was not a contested area, the insurgents owned it."<sup>49</sup>

## The Desert Protectors

Reaching out and engaging the Sunnis in the area was critical to driving a wedge between the insurgents and the Iraqis and to changing the balance of popular support.<sup>50</sup> If the Coalition and GOI helped, they would have to deal with the perception that they were supporting a tribal militia that might be seen as anathema to Iraq's central government's legitimacy. To diffuse this perception, potential recruits needed to be vetted and drafted into government service.

"[Al Qaim] was not a contested area, the insurgents owned it."

Just as the Coalition and GOI viewed militias as a threat to government legitimacy, the Sunni tribesmen, for the most part, found the stigma of being associated with the Ministry of Defense or Ministry of the Interior just as repugnant. Therefore, this new organization, explained the former defense minister, Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, would be known as the Desert Protectors and would be neither "fish nor fowl"—neither part of the Iraqi Army under the Ministry of Defense, nor part of the Iraqi Police under the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>51</sup>

At a safe house in the vicinity of Camp Gannon, Calvert discussed local security force recruitment with representatives of the Albu-Mahal tribe. At the time, the only takers were the Mahalawis; they had already committed

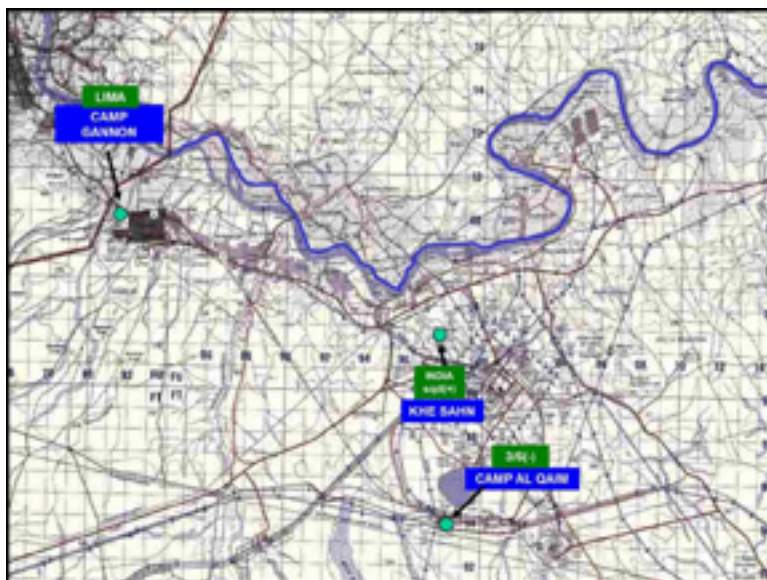


Figure 3: Disposition of Forces at Transfer of Authority<sup>52</sup>

themselves by attacking AQI and were marked men. The remaining tribes were either too intimidated or had already sided with AQI. In late August 2005, a team representing the GOI and the Coalition arrived by helicopter in Akashat to vet several hundred Albu-Mahal tribesmen for enlistment into government service. According to COL Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, commander, Desert Protectors, 279 of the men were deemed fit and inducted. Of those 279, 89 were transported to the East Fallujah Iraqi Compound for training by Special Forces.

While the Desert Protectors were being trained and equipped, 3/6 replaced the 3/2 Marines in Al Qaim on 10 September 2005, and occupied their sites at Camp Al Qaim, Camp Gannon, and the communications retransmission site at Khe Sanh (Figure 3). Lieutenant Colonel Dale

Alford, commander, 3/6 Marines, arrived with an experienced unit, an aggressive plan, and a new approach to liberate the district from the grip of AQI.

Eighty percent of 3/6—including the battalion commander, company commanders, first sergeants, and non-commissioned officers—had fought together eight months earlier in eastern Afghanistan. Although there were differences between the type of fighting they had done in Afghanistan and what they faced in Iraq, the similarities helped shape the unit's concept of operations.

One such similarity between Iraq and Afghanistan was that the population, not the enemy, was the center of gravity. LtCol Alford explained,

You need to understand your enemy before you can protect the population. You've got to figure out who needs killing and who doesn't. The problem is we [the average Coalition Soldier or Marine] wanted to shoot at all of them. Hell, we were making insurgents!<sup>53</sup>

"You've got to figure out who needs killing and who doesn't. Hell, we were making insurgents!"

Alford commented that the number one group that his Marines needed to deal with was "POI—Pissed-off Iraqis!"<sup>54</sup> They had to believe that their interests were better served by siding with the Coalition and GOI than with AQI.

A second similarity was the need for persistent presence. It made little sense to clear an area if there weren't enough forces to remain and hold it. Although 3/6, unlike its predecessor, arrived with its full contingent of Marines, it wasn't enough to do the whole job.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the men of 3/6 also brought an understanding from Afghanistan that they must integrate with the indigenous forces. In late September, 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division (1/1/1 IAD) was deployed to Al Qaim to work with 3/6 and designated Combined Task Force (CTF) 3/6. With the addition of the Iraqis, LtCol Alford now had the resources to establish a combined, persistent presence within the population centers—the key terrain. As he told it,





the enemy in Karabilah on the west side of the wadi. The enemy expected the Coalition to continue the assault from the east.<sup>59</sup> Instead, CTF 3/6, supported by Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/1, each with elements from 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division (1/1 IAD) and the Desert Protectors, repositioned from Camp Al Qaim to the Iraqi/Syrian border, from where they would assault eastward through Husaybah and Karabilah.<sup>60</sup> The RCT mission statement read,

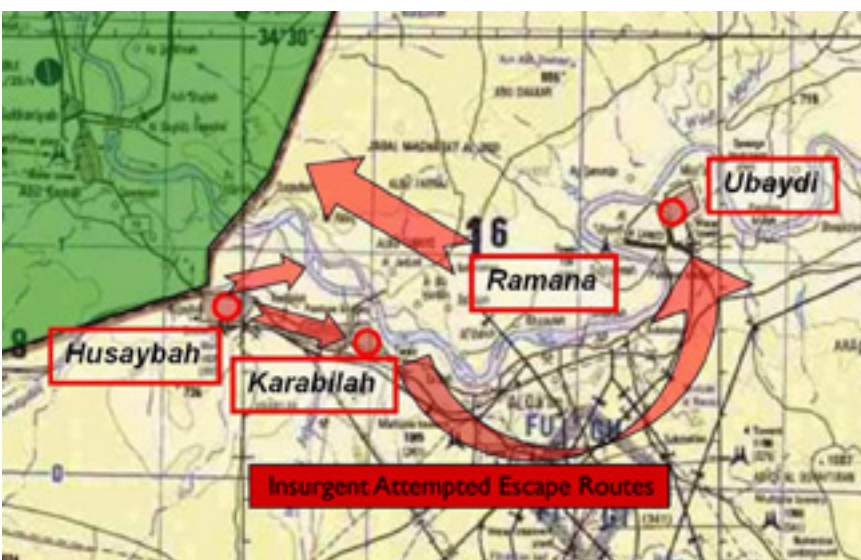
At 0500 5 November, RCT-2 conducts Joint/Combined COIN operations to isolate and clear Husaybah, Karabilah, Ubaydi, & Ramana IOT defeat AQI forces, establish persistent presence, disrupt insurgent activities, facilitate Iraqi restoration of the border and set conditions for national elections in the Al Qaim region.<sup>61</sup>

The enemy clearly knew what it was doing and how to do it.

On 5 November, CTF 3/6 and BLT 2/1 assaulted into Husaybah and the area known as the “440 District” southwest of Husaybah, respectively. Simultaneously, elements of 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (3-504 Inf) inserted by helicopter into the Ramana area to the north of the river, a known insurgent sanctuary.

Despite the tactical surprise, it took CTF 3/6 and BLT 2/1 the next seven days to clear the Husaybah–Karabilah–Sadah area of this sophisticated enemy. Insurgents wore Kevlar helmets and body armor, and fought with a degree of discipline that reflected military or advanced terrorist training. All main roads and avenues of approach were laced with IEDs. Residential buildings were mined to target the Coalition forces as they breached and cleared rooms. If the insurgents encountered superior firepower after engaging Coalition forces, they generally broke contact and conducted coordinated withdrawals to the east, or they discarded evidence of their actions and attempted to blend in with the population (see Figure 6). The enemy clearly knew what it was doing and how to do it.<sup>62</sup>

Immediately upon clearing the areas, CTF 3/6 started constructing firm bases—one in Husaybah, followed by one in Karabilah. On 14 November 2005, 3-504 Inf and BLT 2/1 attacked into Old and New Ubaydi, respectively.



On 16 November, Weapons Company, 3/6 Marines started construction on a firm base in New Ubaydi. From 18 to 21 November, a task force consisting of 4th Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment (4-14 Stryker) and 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division (3/1/1 IAD) cleared the Ramana area north of the river.

Operation Steel Curtain ended on 22 November 2005. An important but often overlooked accomplishment of that operation was that the Desert Protectors proved critical to the mission. Their mission had three primary objectives:

Figure 6: Post-Op Steel Curtain Assessment<sup>63</sup>



- عاش العراق  
ابطال تحرير  
القائم
- 
- A group of Iraqi soldiers in military uniforms are celebrating. They are holding the Iraqi flag (black, white, and red horizontal stripes with a green triangle at the top) and raising their hands in the air. The soldiers are wearing helmets and some have mustaches. The background is a bright, hazy sky.

## Celebration Post-Operation Steel Curtain<sup>65</sup>

CPT Calvert recalled that the Desert Protectors were employed primarily as scouts. As such, they were broken down into small elements and embedded with regular Iraqi Army and Marine units. In this role, they were invaluable to the operation. According to Calvert, however, there were some negative aspects associated with using such a local unit:

The Albu-Mahals were massacred. If you have people who lost family members and they know that somebody else from another tribe was responsible for it, you have to keep a close eye to make sure there aren't any reprisals for past actions.

You also want to make sure that there's no perception that these guys are the new ones in charge and you guys [the other tribe] are going to be squeezed out. A lot of times in dealing with tribes, there is a zero sum game. [They think] that the Albu-Mahals are doing well at the expense of the Karbulis and Salmanis. It's definitely a matter of *appearing* to be doing the right thing, and not just doing the right thing. Perceptions go a long way.<sup>66</sup>

By late November, CTF 3/6 had constructed 16 battle positions in the area from Husaybah to Ubaydi. Each position included Marines and Iraqis—normally a Marine platoon and an Iraqi platoon or company. Those positions were located in such a way that they would reflect combined, permanent, persistent presence (see Figure 8). In other words, the Coalition and Iraqi forces were positioned to live among the people. The next step was for the forces to engage the people.

Mission analysis led LtCol Alford to assign company areas based on the tribal distribution—to link a company with a tribe. This was not an exact science because the tribes were geographically intermingled. The intent was to locate companies in areas where a majority of a tribe



Figure 8: 3/6 Marines Disposition after Operation Steel Curtain (22 November 2005)<sup>67</sup>

resided. As an example, India Company 3/6 dealt mostly with the Karbulis (see the tribal areas in Figure 9). Additionally, the Marines attempted to treat all of the tribes the same and would not hold a meeting unless all of the tribes were represented. According to LtCol Alford,

[Capt Heatherman] directed that the platoon commanders “be part of that tribe.”

When only three of the five tribes showed up, I gathered my crap, and told my guys, we’re leaving. I told Mayor Farhan that when he got all five [tribes, he could] call me... About a week later one of the company commanders told [me] Mayor Farhan had them all. I showed up, and he had four of the five. The Salmani tribe was the one that didn’t show that time. I did the same thing. I picked my stuff up and I left. A few days later he had all five, and then we started dealing.<sup>68</sup>

In practice, treating the tribes equally wasn’t always easy. The Abu-Mahal had taken the greatest risks and LtCol Alford had worked very closely with Sheikh Kurdi, who was now acting head of the tribe, so it was difficult not to favor them over tribes that had until recently sided with AQI. The Marines had to constantly remind themselves to maintain balance. As such, during the drive to recruit tribesmen into the police force, the Coalition solicited help from all of the sheikhs to nominate men from their tribes to create that balance. They also started developing police stations near the battle positions. This process gave the Coalition and Iraq Army forces the opportunity to partner with the police forces in those areas.

Day-to-day engagement with the population occurred at the lower levels—company, platoon, and squad. At the company level, Captain Brendan Heatherman, commander, Kilo Company, 3/6 Marines, used the same technique for locating and assigning his platoons as LtCol Alford had used for assigning companies. He assigned platoons to different tribal areas, and he directed that the platoon commanders “be part of that tribe:” to be an advocate for their tribe in requesting funds, developing projects, and obtaining other resources.

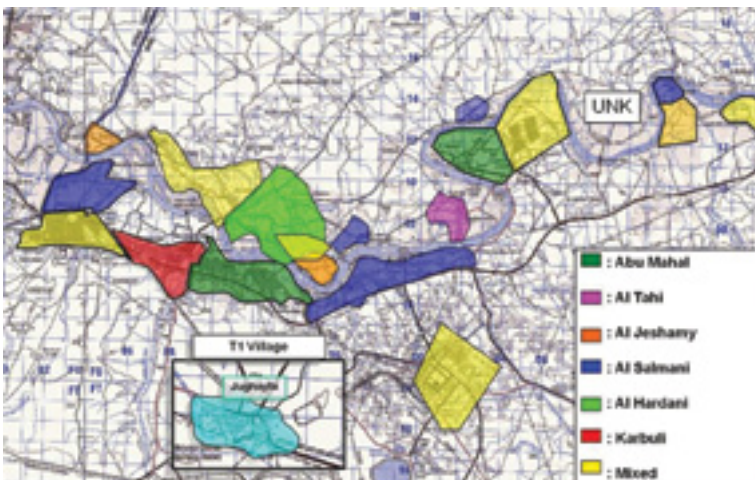


Figure 9: Tribal Areas in Al Qaim<sup>69</sup>

Capt Heatherman became a trusted arbiter. These close engagements helped the Coalition and Iraqi forces separate the insurgents from the populace. As Capt Heatherman recalled,

We knew we really needed to make a connection with the locals to root out the insurgents. To do that, we needed to find out who the players were on the battlefield other than the locals. First and foremost was to find out who the enemy was.<sup>70</sup>

With this goal in mind, Heatherman identified four types of insurgent:

The first was al Qaeda in Iraq, former JTJ (Jama'at al-Tawid wal-Jihad). We had plenty of foreign fighters, and we knew they were coming in through Syria. The second group was local homegrown, yet still hardline al Qaeda. Once we really connected with the people, it was not very hard to figure out who they were, mainly because when we came in and actually stayed, they and their families did not come back. The third were what we called "part-timers." They were locals who for whatever reason decided to attack us and then go back to their store or farm. There were also local, pseudo-Hamza groups who considered it their duty to oust anyone that came into their area. It was mainly the folks from Sadah that joined that.

Based on this analysis, Heatherman gave his platoons decidedly unconventional guidance:

I really wanted the platoon commanders to get down to that local level and become neighbors. I told them to be nosey neighbors. We wanted to know exactly what was going on. And we wanted them [the locals] to tell you [the Marines], because they are comfortable with you. So we patrolled meal-to-meal. You go out in the morning, and you have breakfast. Sometimes you bring food, and sometimes they would.

"I told [the platoon commanders] to be nosey neighbors. We wanted to know exactly what was going on."

This guidance was reinforced at the battalion level. One of the metrics that CTF 3/6 used was known as "eats on streets." Units would report the number of times they shared a meal with an Iraqi or ate a meal in a local café. Additionally, as units entered the community, they always had a specified mission; CTF 3/6 did not conduct so-called "presence" patrols. As LtCol Alford described it,

You did not do presence patrols. When Marines do presence patrols, they'll walk out and they'll kick rocks because they have no focus. That's why ASCOPE [Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, and Events] is so good.<sup>71</sup> You can take one of the six letters of ASCOPE and always put a patrol to it. Okay, you know, S, Structures, you're going to go into this sector and you're going to document every structure in that sector, every structure on that street, and how it can be used by the enemy, how it can be used by us, and how it can be used by the people. You do ASCOPE through three lenses: the enemy, yourself, and the population.<sup>72</sup>

Despite information collected during ASCOPE, understanding the civil structure within a given area wasn't always easy. According to Heatherman, the community leaders in his areas were the sheikhs, imams, and *muktars*. The lead sheikhs were not always present. For example, the paramount sheikh of the Albu-Mahal, Sheikh Sabah, fled to Jordan in August 2005, leaving Sheikh Kurdi in charge.<sup>73</sup> Imams dealt very little with the civil side of things. However, they were still influential because they spoke to the entire community at the mosque. "We did not mess too much with the imams, because they did not want to be messed with," said Heatherman.<sup>74</sup> In his area, the mayor was



“[The platoons and squads] figured out the importance of connecting with the local populace. It kept them safe ... they liked it.”

the *muktar*. *Muktar* is an Arabic word meaning *chosen*. In common usage, it describes someone who is in charge of a village or town. In some areas, the *muktars* were easy to locate, but you had to be careful. Heatherman explained:

When we went to Karabilah ... I spoke with a guy who said he was *muktar*, but what I did not know at the time was that *muktar* could be the *muktar* of three houses or it could be the whole town. I spent two or three weeks with this guy thinking he represented the town of Karabilah, when he really didn't. But by the end of the three weeks he sure did, because we had empowered him with that area of the Karbulis in Karabilah. It was a big mistake. It caused some problems that we later overcame as we met other *muktars* and we started putting it [the civil structure] together.<sup>75</sup>

When asked who pulled all of this information together, Heatherman responded, “Me [at the company level], but it was at every level. They [platoons and squads] had their own bank of knowledge about the area ... this really caught on down to the lowest level. They figured out the importance of connecting with the local populace. It kept them safe, and it made them win; they liked it.”

### Combined, Permanent, Persistent Presence

In January 2006, Colonel Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi deployed 3rd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division (3rd Bde/7th IAD) to Al Qaim. His unit would replace 1st Bde/1st IAD, which had deployed the previous October to support Operation Steel Curtain. COL Ismael grew up in the Al Qaim region and was the cousin of Sheikh Sabah, paramount sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe. COL Ismael continued to command 3rd Bde/7th IAD until March 2008.<sup>76</sup> He helped integrate the Desert Protectors into his brigade, with COL Ahmad becoming the battalion commander for 3rd Battalion and MAJ Mukhlis becoming his intelligence officer. 3rd Bde/7th IAD's location in Al Qaim provided the combined, permanent, persistent presence so important to stabilizing the region. COL Ismael worked with five consecutive Marine battalions as each rotated into the area. In each case, Ismael asked the incoming Marine commander how he was going to help him improve the area (see Table 1 for a full list of the units responsible for the Al Qaim

district). For example, when Lieutenant Colonel Nick Marano, commander, 1/7 Marines arrived in March 2006, COL Ismael told him, “Colonel Alford established a lot of military bases throughout the area, so what are you going to do to support us?” LtCol Marano responded that they could do field reconnaissance to select a new battle position. COL Ismael, agreeing with LtCol Marano's response, said that they “chose the Al Madi [phonetic transliteration] area. The field engineers established that area as Vera Cruz Battle Position and we manned it with a platoon from the Marines and a company from the brigade.”<sup>77</sup>

Deployment Dates	Commander	Unit
March–4 May 2003		CJSOTF–W
4 May 2003–March 2004	LTC William Dolan	1st Sq/3 Armored Cavalry Regiment
March–22 Sept 2004	LtCol Matt Lopez	3/4 Marines
22 Sept 2004–25 March 2005	LtCol Woodbridge	1/7 Marines
March–10 Sept 2005	LtCol Timothy Mundy	3/2 Marines
Sept 2005–16 March 2006	LtCol Julian Alford	3/6 Marines
March–11 Sept 2006	LtCol Nicholas Marano	1/7 Marines
Sept 2006–28 April 2007	LtCol Scott Schuster	3/4 Marines
April 2007–7 Nov 2007	LtCol Jason Bohm	1/4 Marines
1 Nov 2007–5 May 2008	LtCol Peter Baumgarten	3/2 Marines
May–9 Nov 2008	LtCol Steve Grass	2/2 Marines

Table 1: Commanders and Their Units in Al Qaim

By May 2006, Coalition and Iraqi forces had extended their presence along the Euphrates from the Syrian/Iraqi border to Al Amaari. This was almost twice the area that had been covered in February. By September, according to Ismael, they once again doubled that distance and extended their presence to the Rawah/Anah area, 57 miles east of the Syrian/Iraqi border. That concept of combined, permanent, persistent presence, introduced by Col Davis and LtCol Alford to the Al Qaim area in October 2005, was continued and institutionalized by the Iraqis with each subsequent Marine battalion rotation, each of which improved the security of the area. In many cases, those battle positions were partnered with a developing Iraqi police station. Later, when the local police could handle local security on their own, many of those battle positions were dismantled. With the security posture improving, LtCol Marano and COL Ismael were able to increase their efforts to improve the situation in other areas, such as governance and economics, by supporting the development of the judicial system, civic infrastructure, phosphate and cement plants, agriculture, and other areas.

Integral to all of those efforts was the continuous engagement with the Iraqis in what LtCol Marano described as the “Circle of Trust” (Figure 10). In this case, it included the mayor of Al Qaim, the paramount sheikh and sheikh-on-the-ground for the Albu-Mahal tribe, the Iraqi division and brigade commanders, and the S2 (intelligence officer) of the brigade, MAJ Mukhlis, also the leader of the Desert Protectors during Operation Steel Curtain.

It is important to note that at the center of the “Circle of Trust” was not a Marine or an Iraqi government official, but Sheikh Kurdi. Sheikh Kurdi was there at the beginning and was clearly the key leader of the Albu-Mahal tribe throughout the Awakening process. He was a large man, with a no-nonsense but respectful and frank demeanor. He was clear about the original motivation for the development and organization of the Hamza battalion: to fight the Coalition, and, as he exclaimed with some residual pride, “That’s a fact!” But as the situation deteriorated, and simply being Mahalawi was reason enough for beheading by al Qaeda, Sheikh Kurdi recalled, there was a period from August to October 2005 when things started to change for the better: “When Colonel Alford and his Marines came, I said, ‘The sun of freedom rises in the west.’”<sup>79</sup> LtCol Alford, in turn, gave credit to his Marines and all those he worked with—the Desert Protectors, the Iraqi Security Forces, Col Davis, and those units that followed 3/6 into Al Qaim—for continuing to improve the situation. Things started to change for the better when the right people, team, strategy, and resources coalesced at the right time to stop al Qaeda’s savagery.

## The Rest of the Story

The story of Al Qaim’s evolution from an AQI supporter to an AQI opponent is compelling. That story becomes more important, however, when placed in the context of the overall Anbar Awakening. Contrary to popular belief, Al Qaim’s revolt against AQI was not a localized, unrelated event, but part of a



Figure 10: 1/7 Marines’ Circle of Trust, Al Qaim (2006)<sup>78</sup>



Like Iraqis in Al Qaim, Ramadi's populace was all too familiar with AQI's sweeping murder and intimidation campaign.

continuous story line that had a significant impact on, and set the conditions for, the better known Ramadi awakening.

### The Awakening—Ramadi 2006

As mentioned previously, the term Awakening, or *Al Sahawa*, as it applied to events in Iraq, was coined in Ramadi by Sheikh Sattar. Sheikh Sattar was the leader of what some Iraqis considered a lower-tier tribe in Ramadi. He had a checkered past and was described in the media as “a warlord and a highway bandit, an oil smuggler and an opportunist.”<sup>80</sup> Colonel Sean MacFarland, commander, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, also known as the Ready First Combat Team, was willing to risk a partnership with Sheikh Sattar despite his history, because MacFarland saw potential in the sheikh's ability to recruit Iraqis to side against AQI. Like Iraqis in Al Qaim, Ramadi's populace was all too familiar with AQI's sweeping murder and intimidation campaign. In much the same way that the Albu-Mahals partnered with the Coalition to fight AQI in 2005, tribes in Ramadi partnered with the Coalition to fight the insurgents in 2006. According to COL MacFarland, Sheikh Sattar described the movement thus: “We awakened when we realized that the true enemy was the *takfiris*, the extremists [al Qaeda], and that the Coalition was our friend.”<sup>81</sup>

That description left out one group: the GOI. Although Sheikh Sattar's Awakening Council was deeply suspicious of the new local and central governments, COL MacFarland and other Coalition members worked to bring the GOI into the partnership. Security stations manned by Coalition and Iraqi forces were created in neighborhoods throughout Ramadi. A Coalition-influenced characterization of Sheikh Sattar's Awakening reflected a triad strategy—the Iraqi people, the Coalition, and the GOI—similar to the one implemented in Al Qaim. In order to demonstrate how events in Al Qaim and Ramadi were connected, it is necessary to understand the significance of Al Qaim's awakening to later events.

### The Significance of Securing Al Qaim District to the Overall Awakening Movement

The Awakening logically moved from west to east, “a wave coming ashore, not a singular event in any way, shape or form.”

The WERV has served as a route for merchants, smugglers, and soldiers since early history. The Euphrates connects Baghdad and other Iraqi cities with economic and population centers in Syria to the north and with the Persian Gulf to the south. Much of the insurgents' and Coalition forces' movement occurred along the WERV, and not within the open spaces of desert. Control of this relatively narrow band was integral to security, but control of what Brigadier General David Reist, former deputy commanding general of the MEF (FWD), called the *commercial battlespace* was just as important. He coined the term to emphasize the importance of economics and the WERV to the conflict.<sup>82</sup> The Awakening, Reist contended, logically moved from west to east, “a wave coming ashore, not a singular event in any way, shape or form.” The wave, in this case, started in Al Qaim in the summer and fall of 2005. In early 2006, it followed the WERV to the area around the town of Baghdadi.<sup>83</sup> The chief of police in Baghdadi, Colonel Shaban Barzan Abdul Himrin al-Ubaydi, also known as the Lion of Baghdadi, led the fight against AQI. By mid-2006, the Awakening emerged further downstream, in Ramadi.

Sheikh Kurdi summarized the strategic importance of Al Qaim to AQI—not only to AQI’s fight in Al Anbar, but throughout Iraq:

[B]y controlling this [Al Qaim] area ... they would have supplies, finance, and weapons; everything they needed to support operations. When they lost this strategic location, they lost everything: all the logistics support that came from outside Iraq was cut off. No more support of any kind! That’s why when they lost the battle here, they lost everything inside Iraq because everything was coming through the border. Also, it was not just supplies from Al Qaim to Al Anbar province, but supplies to all Iraqi provinces.<sup>84</sup>

The significance of this terrain was not lost on the Coalition. Blocking the Syrian/Iraqi border along the Euphrates at the Husaybah port of entry and securing Al Qaim was part of the Coalition’s larger strategy to restrict the movement of foreign fighters and resources—including suicide bombers and IED materials—from Syria down the Euphrates to Baghdad. This was particularly important as the Coalition and the GOI prepared for the constitutional referendum in October 2005 and for the elections in December 2005.<sup>85</sup> CTF 3/6’s ability to implement a combined, permanent, persistent presence in the Al Qaim district, starting in September 2005, was critical to the start of the Awakening in all of Al Anbar, and, as a result, security continued to improve. By September 2006, as LtCol Marano, commander, 1/7 Marines, prepared for transfer of authority with LtCol Schuster and 3/4 Marines, the Coalition and Iraqis had developed a fairly sophisticated operation to control the physical terrain with prepared obstacles on the border, and the human terrain with Iraqi Army and police stations strategically placed throughout the AO. Some of those stations had already been turned over to full Iraqi control. COL Ismael, commander, 3rd Iraqi Brigade, indicated that security was so effective in the Al Qaim district that AQI had fled to Rawah, a city along the Euphrates River, approximately 57 miles to the east of Husaybah. This did not mean that there were not pockets of AQI in Al Qaim, but by late 2006, Iraqi Security Forces and the Coalition dominated the area.

Security was so effective in the Al Qaim district that AQI had fled to Rawah, a city approximately 57 miles to the east of Husaybah.

In addition to security, a local government had existed since December 2005 when Farhan De Hal Farhan was elected as district mayor.<sup>86</sup> Mayor Farhan was a resident of Fallujah through most of 2004, but fled with his family to Al Qaim in September 2004 just before the Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces assault. As a result of his experiences in Fallujah, he was well aware of AQI’s methods of operation.

### Increasing the Pressure on AQI

At the beginning of this story, in late 2004, AQI and affiliated insurgent forces were seeking sanctuary in Al Qaim and other communities along the Euphrates as they fled Fallujah during Al Fajr, the second battle for Fallujah. The Coalition’s success in Al Fajr both eliminated an insurgent sanctuary and provided a window of opportunity for the January 2005 elections to succeed, while the Iraqi and Coalition occupation of Fallujah started to restrict AQI’s freedom of movement to the east into the Baghdad area.<sup>87</sup> By restricting the flow of foreign fighters and their resources from the west across the Iraqi/Syrian border, success in Al Qaim bookended AQI in Al Anbar along the Euphrates, with Iraqi and Coalition forces dominant in Al Qaim in the west

By early 2006, Ramadi was known as the worst city in Iraq.

and Fallujah in the east. With anti-AQI resistance emerging in Baghdad and Hadithah in early 2006, AQI was running out of places to operate and hide, and it exploited Coalition/Iraqi security gaps in the Ramadi area and to the east toward Fallujah. By early 2006, Ramadi was known as the worst city in Iraq.

### A Continuous Story Line Connected by Relationships and Events

In August 2005, when the leader of the Albu-Mahal, Sheikh Sabah, asked Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, Iraq's minister of defense, for assistance, Sadun turned to GEN Casey for help. GEN Casey responded with funding, equipment, and training to develop the Desert Protectors. Additionally, ODA 582 was assigned advisory responsibility for the development of those tribal forces. While most of the Albu-Mahal tribesmen fled to Akashat, some fled to the Ramadi area, and Mahalawis were later found working with Sheikh Sattar and Sheikh Muhammad Salih al-Suwaydawi in the Ramadi area, supporting the awakening movement there.

In addition to the refugees, there were other ties between the Albu-Mahal and Albu-Risha tribes. Sadun, the principal GOI coordinator for the Desert Protectors, was Sheikh Sattar's uncle, and had grown up next to Sheikh Sattar's family's compound in Ramadi. There was also a connection between Sheikh Sabah and Sheikh Sattar. According to Sheikh Sabah, Sheikh Sattar met him in Jordan to discuss the Albu-Mahal's success against AQI. Sheikh Sattar was increasingly concerned about AQI's grip on the Ramadi area and was looking for ideas on how to counter them.<sup>88</sup>

Sheikh Sattar was increasingly concerned about AQI's grip on the Ramadi area and was looking for ideas on how to counter them.

During his trip to Jordan, Sheikh Sattar also met with other prominent sheikhs to gain their approval and support for his upcoming fight. Notably, Sheikh Majed Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman, co-regent to the Dulaymi Tribal Confederation,<sup>89</sup> supported the Albu-Mahal tribe's revolt against AQI in 2005.<sup>90</sup> He, along with other notable sheikhs in Jordan, approved Sheikh Sattar's request. This support convinced Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to back the Awakening. Maliki reportedly said that there would be "no Awakening unless Majed and the sheikhs agree to it."<sup>91</sup>

The types of people participating in the Awakening went beyond traditional tribal leaders. Among those attending the meeting with Sheikh Sattar and Sheikh Majed was Numan Abdul Mahsen al-Gaoud, a businessman and owner of the Doha Group in Baghdad.<sup>92</sup> The Al Gaouds are a prominent family in the Hit area and belong to the Albu-Nimr tribe. The Albu-Nimr and Albu-Mahal tribes are closely related and share ancestry.<sup>93</sup> Recall that, during the early stages of the Albu-Mahal's fight with AQI, it was Fasal al-Gaoud, a member of the Albu-Nimr tribe and former governor of Al Anbar province, who initially contacted the Americans at Camp Fallujah on behalf of the Albu-Mahal. Additionally, Fasal al-Gaoud attended the announcement of the Awakening by Sheikh Sattar on 14 September 2006 and was an original member of the Awakening Council. Also in attendance, and one of the signatories of the emergency decree, was an Albu-Mahal representative from Al Qaim.

Those connections and relationships were further strengthened by the return of Special Forces teams to the area in 2005 after a short hiatus. As indicated previously, an ODB was deployed to Al Asad with ODAs 582, 555, and 545 deployed to Al Qaim, Hadithah, and Hit, respectively, to work with the tribes and develop those relationships from the bottom up. In fact, Major General James Mattis, 1st Marine Division commander from August 2002 to August 2004, credits Major Adam Such, Special Forces, with making initial contact with the Albu-Nimr tribe as early as mid-2004; Such, per Mattis's account, "actually began what eventually morphed into the Anbar Awakening."<sup>94</sup>

Major General James Mattis credits Major Adam Such, Special Forces [who], per Mattis's account, "actually began what eventually morphed into the Anbar Awakening."

### Disconnected Perspectives, Rather than Disconnected Events

Although some Americans acknowledge the Albu-Mahal tribe's actions in Al Qaim during 2005–2006 as the first tribal uprising against Al Qaeda, most characterize the two movements—in Al Qaim and Ramadi—as isolated and unrelated. Additionally, Al Qaim's awakening is acknowledged more as a footnote than as a major contributor and enabler to the larger movement. In the Coalition's eyes, it might seem that way, but the Iraqis were aware of the tribal communications, coordination, and affiliations. So why do so many Americans view the Al Qaim awakening in such a limited way?

Colonel Michael Walker, commander, 3rd Civil Affairs Group in Iraq from February to September 2004, offered one explanation for this disconnect. COL Walker pointed to the Al Gaoud family as a key factor in understanding the relationship between events in Al Qaim and Ramadi. He cited the revolt of the Albu-Mahal against AQI in 2005 as the first of several tipping points, and attributed the start of the Awakening to the relationships that the MEF established with the Iraqis in 2004 and, in particular, with members of the Al Gaoud family of the Albu-Nimr tribe. COL Walker attributed much of the Coalition's inability to recognize the relationships to a "Coalition time versus Arab time" mind-set.<sup>95</sup> Members of the Coalition, on the one hand, perceived events in Iraq based upon the length of their deployments; Marines, for example, saw the sequence of events in seven-month rotational increments. The Iraqis, on the other hand, visualized and connected events during the entire time frame, which in turn related to their collective memories of events predating the 2003 invasion. They could bridge these events and see continuity where the Coalition could only perceive incremental and disconnected episodes.<sup>96</sup>

Colonel Michael Walker attributed the start of the Awakening to the relationships that the MEF established with the Iraqis in 2004.

Another reason why many fail to recognize the connections can be traced to a classified intelligence report that was leaked to the press in September 2006, two weeks before Sheikh Sattar announced the Awakening in Ramadi. The classified report concluded that the Multi-National Forces and Iraqi Security Forces were "no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency in Al Anbar."<sup>97</sup> It went on to report that the tribal system "wholly failed in AO Raleigh and Topeka and has only limited efficacy in AO Denver."<sup>98</sup> The only exception noted in the report was Fallujah, where the tribes still functioned despite "local politics in Al Anbar [being] anemic or dysfunctional due to insurgent intimidation...".<sup>99</sup> While a number of Coalition senior leaders in Al Anbar characterized the report as basically accurate when read in its entirety, the report unfortunately set a despondent tone when select elements

were headlined in the media. The report led many to conclude that there was no success on the ground. This perception, however, conflicted with the growing reality, which was that tribes were increasingly siding against AQI in the cities and towns of Al Anbar.

Iraqis awoke to AQI's intentions in 2004 in Fallujah, partnered with the Coalition and GOI to defeat AQI in Al Qaim, and challenged AQI's power along the Western Euphrates in such areas as Baghdadi. By early to mid-2006, the movement had already begun in Ramadi. Colonel Tony Deane, Task Force 1-35 Armor, had been conducting police recruiting drives with Sheikh Sattar and the Albu-Risha tribe in Ramadi since 4 July 2006.<sup>100</sup> Several weeks later, on 14 July, COL MacFarland announced on a televised Department of Defense news briefing that "I think we have turned a corner here in Ramadi."<sup>101</sup>

The Iraqis were well aware of the significance of Al Qaim, and they would count it as the physical starting point of the Awakening.

The Al Qaim events and their relation to the overall Awakening might have retained their significance if the media had not chosen to highlight the elements of the leaked report that so authoritatively and adamantly denied any successes in the Anbar area, with the exception of Fallujah. Much of the U.S. audience was left with the impression that success did not start in Al Anbar until the Army's Ready First Combat Team arrived in Ramadi in June 2006.<sup>102</sup> As more detailed research makes clear, however, the Iraqis were well aware of the connections, relationships, and significance of Al Qaim, and they would count it as the physical starting point of the Awakening.

When Sheikh Sattar's successor, Sheikh Ahmed Albu-Risha, was asked about the first instance of an Iraqi tribe turning on AQI, he responded matter-of-factly, "Albu-Mahal in Al Qaim."<sup>103</sup> He spoke of contacting Sheikh Sabah of the Albu-Mahal in 2005 and offering to help. Sheikh Sabah asked that they contact Dr. Dulaymi, the minister of defense and a member of the Albu-Risha tribe, to solicit GOI support. Sheikh Ahmed's brother Khamis travelled to Baghdad and met with Sadun—and now "you know the rest of the story."

## Conclusion

Al Qaim's awakening was one of the first significant examples of a successful counterinsurgency operation in Iraq. But the battalion commander refused credit for the strategy, citing operations in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969: "[T]his is nothing new, it is just protecting the population. In order to do that you've got to live where the population is."<sup>104</sup>

Conditions in Al Qaim—security, governance, and economics—continued to mature and stabilize. In addition to restricting the flow of foreign fighters and their resources into Al Anbar and Iraq, success in Al Qaim had other critical, far-reaching effects: The word was out that AQI could be beaten. Events in Al Qaim provided a glimmer of hope to other Iraqis, saying to them, "We can do this; we can beat AQI." Subsequently, developments in Al Qaim set a precedent for other towns and cities in Al Anbar, providing them with psychological encouragement, strategies, and examples passed along via societal



networks and relationships. The awakening, or *sahawa*, became the *Sahawa*, a collective effort by communities along the Euphrates, driven to its peak in Ramadi as the insurgents ran out of room to hide.<sup>105</sup> This collaboration, grounded in Iraqi culture and societal networks, albeit unrecognized by most outsiders, provides a deeper, more coherent, and continuous story line of the Awakening movement. ❖

The awakening, or *sahawa*, became the *Sahawa*, a collective effort by communities along the Euphrates.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## APPENDIX: ABBREVIATIONS

AO	Area of Operations	GOI	Government of Iraq
AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq	IAD	Iraqi Army Division
BLT	Battalion Landing Team	LTC	Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
Capt	Captain, U.S. Marine Corps or U.S. Air Force	LtCol	Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
COIN	Counterinsurgency	MAJ	Major, U.S. Army
COL	Colonel, U.S. Army	Maj	Major, U.S. Marine Corps or U.S. Air Force
Col	Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps or U.S. Air Force	MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
CP	Command Post	ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
CPT	Captain, U.S. Army	ODB	Operational Detachment Bravo
CTF	Combined Task Force	RCT	Regimental Combat Team
FM	Field Manual	SVBIED	Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
GEN	General, U.S. Army	WERV	Western Euphrates River Valley
Gen	General, U.S. Marine Corps or U.S. Air Force		

## NOTES

- 1 Dr. Knarr was a project leader at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) when this article was first written.
- 2 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, USMC, and LtCol David Graves, USMC, interview with COL Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, former commander, Desert Protectors, Husaybah, Iraq, 18 April 2010. (Col Alford appears as LtCol Alford in the text. He has since been promoted.)
- 3 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010. Also found in Col Gary W. Montgomery and CWO-4 Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives* (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), 141. *Sahawa* is Arabic for *awakening*.
- 4 It is a commonly held belief that the events in Al Qaim and Ramadi were unconnected. Individuals with this perspective include James Soriano, U.S. Department of State, Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader in Iraq, 2006–2009, and LtCol Kurtis Wheeler (see CWO-4 Timothy McWilliams and LtCol Kurtis S. Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume I: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009* [Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2009]).
- 5 Two such historians include Bing West (*The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq*, New York: Random House, 2008) and Bob Woodward (*The War Within*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).
- 6 *Sahawa*, or *Awakening* with an uppercase “A,” refers to the overall movement. The term *sahawa*, or awakening with a lowercase “a,” refers to individual movements in specific areas such as Al Qaim or Ramadi.
- 7 The COIN practices that were used in Al Qaim and several other Iraqi cities as early as September 2005 were some of the same practices that were later codified and institutionalized by the publication of FM 3-24 in December 2006.

- 8 Col Dale Alford, USMC, briefing on 3/6 Marines in Al Qaim, Iraq, August 2005 to March 2006, presented at the Institute for Defense Analyses, Alexandria, Virginia, 16 February 2010.
- 9 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, USMC, and LtCol David Graves, USMC, interview with Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan al-Mahalawi, at Sheikh Kurdi's guesthouse, Ubaydi, Iraq, 17 April 2010.
- 10 "And that's a fact!" exclaimed Sheikh Kurdi, obviously proud of the fact that his tribe was one of the first to oppose the Coalition—the occupiers. Sheikh Kurdi was the on-the-ground leader of the Albu-Mahal tribe after Sheikh Sabah, the paramount sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe, fled to Jordan. From Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.
- 11 *Forced* was a descriptor used by many Americans to describe marriages of foreign fighters to local women. However, most of the Iraqis whom the authors interviewed in the Al Qaim area did not agree with the use of the word *forced*. Sheikh Kurdi explained that because the foreign fighters were there on a jihad, they could not simply take a woman because religiously that would be improper, so they "arranged" the marriages. However, these marriages were not always without some sort of intimidation. Unfortunately, once the foreign fighter died or left Iraq, there was no one to take care of the widow and children.
- 12 Camp Gannon was named for Maj Richard Gannon, commanding officer, Lima Company, 3/7 Marines. Maj Gannon was awarded the Silver Star for his actions on 17 April 2004 while attempting to save members of his company. He was killed in action.
- 13 Dr. William Knarr and Col Dale Alford, USMC, interview with Col Stephen Davis, USMC, former commander, RCT-2, at Davis' office, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 25 May 2010.
- 14 MajGen Tom Jones, USMC (Ret.), interview with Maj Frank Diorio, USMC, Camp Pendleton, California, 8 February 2011.
- 15 During his initial in-country briefings, Maj Diorio had heard of the "fire truck." It was reportedly laden with explosives and embedded in a village near Al Asad. The Coalition did not dispose of it because of the collateral damage it could cause in the area. The truck, a high-value resource to the insurgency, had been whisked away by the insurgents to be used against a future high-priority target.
- 16 Knarr and Alford, Davis interview, 25 May 2010. Images taken from insurgent video footage provided by Col Davis.
- 17 Jones, Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Amhad interview, 18 April 2010.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid. Also found in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*, 141.
- 23 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.
- 24 Hannah Allam and Mohammed al-Dulaimy, "Iraqis Lament a Call for Help," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 May 2005. The authors indicated that other Al Qaim tribes, in addition to the Albu-Mahal, were also resisting AQI, but our research found no support for that contention.
- 25 Global Resources Group, "Iraq Tribal Study: Al-Anbar Governorate," 18 June 2006, 4-17, 4-28: [http://turcopolier.typepad.com/the\\_athenaeum/files/iraq\\_tribal\\_study\\_070907.pdf](http://turcopolier.typepad.com/the_athenaeum/files/iraq_tribal_study_070907.pdf)
- 26 Allam and al-Dulaimy, "Iraqis Lament."
- 27 A Mahalawi is an Albu-Mahal tribal member.
- 28 Kevin Flower, Enes Dulami, and Kianne Sadeq, "Hunt for Insurgents near Syria Ends," *CNN.com, World*, 14 May 2005: <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/05/14/iraq.main/index.html>
- 29 Allam and al-Dulaimy, "Iraqis Lament."
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 The tribe has also been referred to as the Karabilah tribe.
- 32 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010.
- 33 Bill Roggio, "Operations Spear in Anbar Province," *Long War Journal*, 17 June 2005: [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2005/06/operation\\_spear\\_1.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2005/06/operation_spear_1.php)
- 34 Dr. William Knarr, interview with Col Timothy Mundy, former commander, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment (3/2 Marines) in Al Qaim from March 2005 to September 2005, School of Infantry at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 14 January 2011.
- 35 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.
- 36 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010.
- 37 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, and LtCol David Graves, interview with Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, former minister of defense, at Dulaymi's home, Baghdad, Iraq, 24 April 2010.
- 38 Jones, Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.
- 39 The narrative is true; however, the contact names and their specific locational data have been changed.
- 40 Jones, Diorio interview, 8 February 2011. The quotes from Diorio on the following two pages came from this same interview.
- 41 Ellen Knickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, "Insurgents Assert Control over Town near Syrian Border," *The Washington Post Foreign Service*, 6 September 2005.
- 42 At the time, it was the Iraqi Transitional Government, or ITG; however, we will use *GOI* throughout the article to indicate the Iraqi Government.
- 43 Knarr and Alford, Davis interview, 25 May 2010.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 RCT-2 Briefing, Regimental Combat Team 2, "Viking in the Valley," briefing presented to Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia, 15 September 2006.
- 46 Col Davis, commander, RCT-2, credits the increase in force structure to General George Casey's understanding of the situation and intent to exploit success in the WERV.
- 47 The previously deployed ODA was 1st Group, which was there from January 2004 to fall 2004. Brent Lindeman, "Better Lucky Than Good: A Theory of Unconventional Minds and the Power of 'Who,'" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009), [http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2009/Dec/09Dec\\_Lindeman.pdf](http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2009/Dec/09Dec_Lindeman.pdf)
- 48 5th Group, 3rd Battalion, B Company, now 5322.
- 49 Dr. William Knarr and Mary Hawkins, interview with Captain Jim Calvert, commander, ODA 582, Institute for Defense Analyses, Alexandria, Virginia, 26 November 2010. Pseudonym used at the request of the service member and his unit.
- 50 Multi-National Force–Iraq Campaign Progress Review, 12 December 2004.
- 51 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Dulaymi interview, 24 April 2010.
- 52 Image is courtesy of the 3/6 Marines.
- 53 Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 3/2 Marines gave one of its rifle companies to Al Asad for base security; 3/6 Marines wasn't required to do that.
- 56 Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.

- 57 Image is courtesy of the 3/6 Marines.
- 58 Image is courtesy of Col Stephen Davis.
- 59 Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.
- 60 Those forces swung south through the desert to remain undetected as they moved to the border area, and then moved north to reposition for the assault.
- 61 RCT-2 Briefing, "Viking in the Valley."
- 62 Knarr and Alford, Davis interview, 25 May 2010.
- 63 Image is courtesy of Col Stephen Davis.
- 64 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, USMC, and LtCol David Graves, USMC, interview with MAJ Mukhlis Shadhan Ibrahim al-Mahalawi, Husaybah, Iraq, 18 April 2010.
- 65 Image is courtesy of MAJ Mukhlis.
- 66 Knarr and Hawkins, Calvert interview, 26 November 2010.
- 67 Image is courtesy of the 3/6 Marines.
- 68 Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.
- 69 Image is courtesy of Col Nick Marano, USMC. (At the time of the events described, he was a LtCol.)
- 70 Dr. William Knarr, interview with Capt Brendan Heatherman, former commander, Kilo Company, 3/6 Marines, Marine Corps University, 24 February 2010. The quotes from Heatherman in the following paragraphs came from this same source.
- 71 ASCOPE: Civil considerations in tactical planning concentrates on an in-depth analysis of Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, and Events. Headquarters, Department of the Army, "Counterinsurgency," FM 3-24.
- 72 Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.
- 73 Dr. William Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, and Mary Hawkins, interview with Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz, principal sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe in Al Qaim, Amman, Jordan, 3 February 2011.
- 74 Knarr, Heatherman interview, 24 February 2010.
- 75 Ibid. The quote from Heatherman in the following paragraph came from this same source.
- 76 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, and LtCol David Graves, interview with sBG Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi, commander of 7th IAD, at Dulaymi's office, Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, 15 April 2010. 3rd Bde/7th IAD would later be reflagged as 28th Bde/7th IAD.
- 77 MajGen Tom Jones, USMC (Ret.), interview with Col Nick Marano, USMC, former commander, 1/7 Marines, at Marano's office, Camp Pendleton, California, 9 February 2011.
- 78 Image is courtesy of Col Nick Marano, USMC. In the figure, Ismael is spelled Ishmail.
- 79 Knarr, Alford, and Graves, Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.
- 80 Joshua Partlow, Ann Scott Tyson, and Robin Wright, "Bomb Kills a Key Sunni Ally of U.S.," *The Washington Post*, 14 September 2007: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/13/AR2007091300490.html>
- 81 Dr. William Knarr, interview with BG (formerly COL when commanding the 1st BCT) Sean MacFarland, 13 October 2010. Sheikh Sattar's characterization was related in one of the early meetings with MacFarland and is consistent with his initial actions in partnering with the Coalition but not embracing the local provincial government.
- 82 This information and following quote are from Dr. William Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, Col Tracy King, USMC, and Mary Hawkins, interview with BrigGen David G. Reist, USMC (Ret.), former deputy commanding general (Support), I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) Multi-National Force-West from February 2006 to February 2007, Alexandria, Virginia, 4 October 2010.
- 83 Baghdadi is near Al Asad, between Al Qaim to the northwest and Fallujah to the southeast.
- 84 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, USMC, and LtCol David Graves, USMC, interview with Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan al-Mahalawi, at Sheikh Kurdi's guesthouse, Ubaydi, Iraq, 17 April 2010.
- 85 Knarr and Alford, Davis interview, 25 May 2010.
- 86 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, USMC, and LtCol David Graves, USMC, interview with Farhan De Hal Farhan, mayor of Al Qaim district, Ubaydi, Iraq, 17 April 2010.
- 87 William Knarr and Robert Castro, "The Battle for Fallujah: AL FAJR—the Myth-buster," Institute for Defense Analyses Paper P-4455, September 2009.
- 88 Knarr, Graves, and Hawkins, Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.
- 89 The Dulaymi Tribal Confederation is the largest and most influential tribe in Al Anbar. The tribe has a rich history in Iraq, dating back before Islam was born.
- 90 Dr. William Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, and Mary Hawkins, interview with Sheikh Majed Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman, Amman, Jordan, 3 February 2011.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Dr. William Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, and Mary Hawkins, interview with Numan al-Gaoud, owner of the Doha Group in Baghdad, Amman, Jordan, 13 February 2011.
- 93 Dr. William Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, and Mary Hawkins, interview with Jalal al-Gaoud, Iraqi businessman in Jordan, Amman, Jordan, 5 February 2011.
- 94 McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*, 24–25.
- 95 Dr. William Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, and Mary Hawkins, interview with Col Michael Walker, via telephone, 6 January 2011.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Thomas E. Ricks, "Situation Called Dire in West Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 11 September 2006. Officially, the report is known as the "State of the Emergency in Al Anbar," I MEF G-2, 17 August 2006 (no author named). It was cleared for open publication 16 December 2010 by the Office of Security Review, Department of Defense and declassified by U.S. Central Command Memorandum 10-012, at the request of Dr. William Knarr.
- 98 "State of the Emergency in Al Anbar," 1.
- 99 Ibid., 4.
- 100 Dr. William Knarr, interview with COL Anthony Deane, former commander, Task Force 1-35 Armor, also known as "Task Force Conqueror," in Ramadi, from June to November 2006, at COL Deane's office, Battle Command Training Program, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 12 October 2010.
- 101 COL Sean MacFarland, DoD news briefing/interview, televised 14 July 2006; in a 29 September 2006 DoD news briefing, MacFarland announced, "I think we've actually tipped. Attacks are down 25 percent over the past couple of months, and coalition forces, together with the Iraqi security forces, have steadily increased their presence inside of the city."
- 102 The intent here is not to marginalize the RFCT's accomplishments, which were dramatic and significant, but to point out that they were made much more so as a result of the dismal tone of the leaked report.



103 Dr. William Knarr, Col Dale Alford, USMC, and LtCol David Graves, USMC, interview with Sheikh Ahmed Bezia Fteikhan al-Rishawi, paramount sheikh of the Albu-Risha tribe and president of the Mutammar Sahwat al-Iraq (The Iraq Awakening Party—MSI), at Sheikh Ahmed's guesthouse, Ramadi, Iraq, 22 April 2010.

104 Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.

105 In fact, expelling the insurgents from Al Qaim probably exacerbated the situation in Ramadi. Ramadi became AQI's Alamo. AQI was being rejected along the Euphrates; the jihadis had no other place to go except eastward. As they moved east, they moved farther from any sanctuary support in Syria, making a tough situation tougher. Although AQI was not completely defeated, Ramadi was its last significant urban staging area and the last, and largest, symbol of its power.



Shiite and Sunni members of the Joint Security Committee (JSC) attend the first Anbar-Kabala JSC Meeting at the Ramadi Governance Center in Ramadi, Iraq, 30 October 2007. Members attended the gathering in honor of Sheikh Ahmed Abu Reesha, who recently obtained the chief position in the Anbar Awakening Council after the assassination of his brother the previous month.



## Inside Anbar

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT THE COUNTERINSURGENCY EXPERIENCES OF TWO United States Special Forces Soldiers, William and Robert, and their operational detachments, which fought in al Anbar during the period from February 2004 to April 2007. It is a condensed version of several chapters of a thesis I wrote four years ago while attending the Naval Postgraduate School.<sup>1</sup> A lot of other people have written about the American counterinsurgency experience in al Anbar: academics, journalists, Soldiers, and Marines in monographs, theses, articles, and books. These accounts devote considerable attention to the Awakening, an event that has taken on mythical proportions, a lot like the Surge. I think readers will notice that the stories recounted in the following pages offer a distinctly different flavor.

*MAJ Brent Lindeman, USA  
Special Forces*

### William's War<sup>2</sup>

Well versed in American history and conversant in Arabic, William has perfected the art of selling himself as “just a dumb hillbilly.” He is anything but.

When William returned to Iraq in 2004 for Operation Iraqi Freedom II (OIF II), he was beginning his 14th consecutive year in the 5th Special Forces Group and had already chalked up four previous combat missions—to the Gulf (in the first Gulf War), Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq in 2003. All told, William had over seven years' time on the ground in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and Africa.

William's first mission on his return to Iraq in 2004 was not counterinsurgency. It was to identify and exploit opportunities to split al Qaeda elements from nationalist strands of the insurgency or, as it was called, the resistance. Early on, the 5th Special Forces Group headquarters had theorized that this should be possible in Sunni-dominated al Anbar. The thinking was that by exposing and encouraging such a rift, irreconcilables could be unmasked and targeted. Second Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group tasked William and his Operational Detachment–Alpha, ODA 555, to look for and exploit just such opportunities. Or, as William described it, his ODA was “looking for guys to gun up against al Qaeda in Iraq.” What is important to note is the vagueness of ODA 555's initial mission. The command acknowledged that it did not have a complete enough picture of the situation on the ground.

As William described it, his ODA was “looking for guys to gun up against al Qaeda in Iraq.”

### OIF II

ODA 555 operated from al Asad Airbase. Al Asad was centrally located in the ODA's area of operations (AO), which extended along the Euphrates River Valley (ERV) for approximately 150 miles, from Rawah southeast to the Highway 10/12 split near Mohammadi, and included vast swaths of desert on either side of the river corridor. Third Armored Cavalry Regiment (3rd ACR) was initially responsible for the battlespace that encompassed 555's AO when

the team arrived in January 2004; Marine Regimental Combat Team (RCT) 7 replaced 3rd ACR in February.

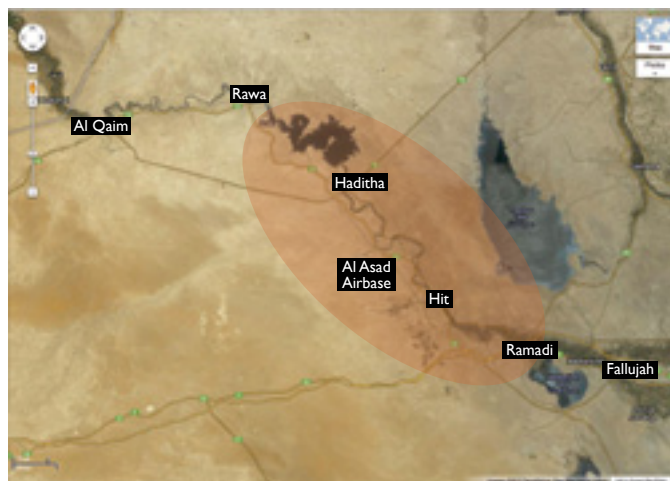


Figure 1: ODA 555's Area of Operations, 2004

William knew [from] a basic understanding of tribalism in Anbar, that legitimacy emanated from power and prestige, not titles and uniforms.

### First Contact

American commanders in Anbar initially worked through police forces and city councils. However, few American units had vetted the local police and city councils in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Instead, police and council members were assumed to be legitimate. In other words, Americans assumed that armed men wearing blue shirts were police just because they were armed men wearing blue shirts.

William and ODA 555 were skeptical. As William put it:

We [the coalition] just completely changed out a whole government! Who's to say who's a good cop, or who's a bad cop? We did not know what or who was considered legitimate by the people in Anbar at that point, although we made an assumption that the tribes were still a legitimate source of power that held influence. Saddam, after all, had had to manage the tribes, not police forces and city councils.

The ODA's plan was simple: identify the most powerful tribe in the AO and co-opt it.

William knew, based on experience in the Middle East and a basic understanding of tribalism in Anbar, that legitimacy emanated from power and prestige, not titles and uniforms. Therefore, in his assessment, power and prestige lay with the tribes.<sup>3</sup> William also assumed that he would be competing with al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other insurgent groups for the support of the tribes and their inherent ability to self-mobilize. The ODA's plan was thus simple: identify the most powerful tribe in the AO and co-opt it. How exactly co-option would be executed would depend on what the ODA could learn, how relationships developed, and what the situation permitted or suggested.

ODA 555 soon discovered that a significant population of the Albu Nimr tribe resided in its AO. The Albu Nimr are one of the largest tribes of the Dulami Tribal Confederation dominating al Anbar. William also discovered that one of the informants that ODA 555 inherited from the previous ODA was a member of the Albu Nimr. William nicknamed this informant Nubs.

Nubs was from the poor Shamal clan. By profession a fisherman, Nubs supplemented his income during Saddam's reign by smuggling. According to Nubs and others who knew him, he had survived numerous regime attempts to arrest or kill him. According to one story, Nubs had mailed the hand of a would-be assassin back to the authorities. True or not, Nubs was exactly the type of individual William wanted to "gun up." Nubs was competent, wily, and resourceful. He became William's way into the Nimr.

Working with the direct support of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) and General James Mattis, William used Nubs to help create a provisional company of Shamal-Albu Nimr tribesmen from the town of Tal Aswad in the al Phurat area, Hit district.<sup>4</sup> Over time this Nimr unit successfully conducted operations for the Marines in Rawah and other places. Most significantly, the provisional Nimr company ensured that Route Uranium was cleared of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), allowing Marine reinforcements to flow from al Asad to Fallujah in support of Operation Vigilant Resolve (the First Battle of Fallujah) unimpeded.

William solidified his rapport with the Nimr provisionals by conducting small civil affairs projects in Tal Aswad. These projects were never about winning hearts and minds. William knew that the ODA's infusion of money and power into the Tal Aswad community would attract the attention of influential sheikhs, since Tal Aswad was a poor Shamal community consisting of farmers and fishermen. He understood that, because patronage was key to how sheikhs maintained power and influence over their tribal constituents, these sheikhs would not tolerate the residents of Tal Aswad prospering independently; this would undermine their authority. Thus, William wasn't at all surprised when Sheikh Reshad, the paramount sheikh of the Albu Nimr, called him and asked for an introductory meeting. William responded by inviting Sheikh Reshad to meet him at al Asad Airbase. In doing so, not only did William succeed in maneuvering Sheikh Reshad into making the initial approach—meeting William on William's terms—but also into coming to a meeting on William's ground. William thereby began their relationship from a position of dominance.



Figure 2: Hit District and Al Phurat

William [succeeded] in maneuvering Sheikh Reshad into making the initial approach [and] coming to a meeting on William's ground.

### Conventional Foil

In hindsight, William's approach may seem strikingly commonsensical, almost as if he did not think it through. Yet, William continuously assessed and reassessed the ODA's plan. Worth noting is that this was well in advance of the Awakening and the development of the Sons of Iraq.



Listen, we didn't start out to conduct counterinsurgency. We [ODA 555] started out trying to find a way to get good guys to kill bad guys. That meant that we could not waste our time looking for bad guys; we needed to find the good guys first. Find the good guys, help them secure their lives and prosper, and they will find the bad guys for you because they want to protect what they have.

In counterinsurgency, you have to give in to the reasonable demands of the population if you want to get their support.



There are different ways to go about this. We did it by organizing a provisional unit based on tribal and geographic cohesion. That way, once guys committed to the unit, they had a stake in protecting each other and their town. We also didn't assume that we had the right guys. We constantly looked for indicators that either confirmed or denied that what we were doing was working. Threats and attacks against the Nimr were a very good sign that we were being successful. The key event occurred in May 2004, when someone threw a bomb over the wall into Sheikh Reshad's compound. That not only was an indicator that our efforts were a threat to AQI, it also pushed Sheikh Reshad further in line with the coalition.

We also listened to the Nimr's concerns. Their primary concern was safeguarding their families and property. They wanted to do it themselves. In that respect, it was no different from colonial militias in our country before the Revolutionary War. They were not interested in serving in any other area in Anbar or chasing bad guys if it meant leaving their homes unguarded. We reached a compromise with them where one-third of the provisional company would conduct offensive operations for me as long as we left the other two-thirds to guard the home front. Our *wasta* went up by finding a way to work within their concerns.<sup>5</sup> In counterinsurgency, you have to give in to the reasonable demands of the population, if you can, if you want to get their support.

The Marines, on the other hand, didn't take this approach. The Marines were technically correct in their approach, but intuitively wrong. The first thing is that they [Marines] never worked with the right people while I was there. I will use Hit district as an example. 2-7 Marines focused their engagement efforts on the city council and police, who were controlled, influenced, and/or manipulated by the insurgents. There were plenty of indicators. One was that the police would call the Marines up within 30 minutes usually, after a mortar attack on Camp Hit where 2-7 was based, and say they knew who was responsible. But the police never, ever caught who was responsible. How's that? The police were just providing throwaway names to appease the Marines.

The city council members were also not the right people to be dealing with. They were under insurgent control and were not the most powerful entity in the district to begin with. The Nimr were. I remember some representatives from 2-7 Marines telling me about a Hit city council meeting they attended. This meeting occurred two days after Sheikh Reshad's family compound in Zuwayyah was bombed. The Marines said that Sheikh Reshad strode in like he owned the place and told them [the council] that if any Nimr were hurt, he would level the city. The Marines said that some of those council members shook in their boots. This event told me two things. One, Sheikh Reshad knew that the council had extremist or AQI ties. They were someone's puppets, through whom he was sending a message. If not, he wouldn't have chosen to direct his



“threat towards them. Two, being told of the visceral reaction of many of the council members, I knew they feared organized tribal retaliation by the Nimr. These two observations proved to me that I had chosen to back the right player. That being said, 2–7 Marines continued trying to work through the police and city council.”<sup>6</sup>

The Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) were also a mess. The reason was, again, they were not the right people, and they were not properly employed. The name Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, or even the later name, Iraqi National Guard, suggests a local militia, which it was not. The ICDC recruits were not vetted through the tribes. Neither were the police or the city council. The tribal structures were the only ones available that could do three things we needed: 1) vet recruits; 2) provide leverage to keep recruits in line; and 3) provide community leaders who could be held accountable for the actions of the recruits. The other major factor in the ICDC’s failure was that ICDC units were not employed in safeguarding their own tribal and community areas.

For example, ICDC recruits from Hit were used in Haditha. This action also had a number of negative consequences. ICDC members had no incentive to safeguard someone else’s hometown. Employing the ICDC outside of their communities also negated the tribe as a mechanism for maintaining accountability. It was thought that employing ICDC elsewhere would limit corruption and graft. The truth was this action encouraged extortion and pilfering. We removed the Iraqis’ own system of social accountability by employing tribesmen in tribal areas other than their own. There was also another fundamental flaw in employing Anbaris, who are tribesmen, in other tribesmen’s areas. The local populace does not consider them legitimate. Think of the Texas Rangers. They were Texans, working in Texas. The Rangers didn’t hire men from Oklahoma, and they didn’t try to enforce the law outside of Texas. What is so hard to understand?

It’s funny, the Marines said that the ICDC were disbanded because they failed to meet expectations. Everyone blames the Iraqis. No one pays attention to the fact that the Marines were responsible for running the program, training and advising the ICDC. The Marines failed because they made mistakes in how they recruited and employed the ICDC.

“Sheikh Reshad knew that the [Hit city] council had extremist or AQI ties. If not, he wouldn’t have chosen to direct his threat towards them.”

“We removed the Iraqis’ own system of social accountability by employing tribesmen in tribal areas other than their own.”

### Figuring It Out

William spent an extraordinary amount of time just trying to understand exactly how AQI and other extremist elements were functioning within ODA 555’s AO; he complained that almost every S2 (intelligence officer) he met with, or heard brief, only described the enemy’s actions.<sup>7</sup> An S2, for example, might brief that the enemy was planting IEDs in a particular area or that the enemy was using violence and coercion to influence the population but never include speculations as to why that might be or for what purpose it was being done.

[C]onventional operations were mis-focused and, sometimes, operations simply had nothing to do with the enemy situation at all.

No S2 that William remembers ever presented a concept of what al Qaeda's or the insurgents' goals were, how they were trying to achieve those goals, and what resources they needed to achieve them. This meant that conventional operations were mis-focused and, sometimes, operations simply had nothing to do with the enemy situation at all. William likened it to boxing. A boxer has to know what his opponent is doing before he can counter it. A good boxer does not keep trying to block the jab while right crosses are pounding him.

William summarized this by recounting a briefing he sat in on with 2–7 Marines:

I sat in on one brief in which the S2 said that the enemy was using violence and coercion to influence the population. The S3 [operations officer] then got up and explained how the unit was going to conduct a patrol in order to hand out soccer balls and demonstrate a presence. What part of the S2's brief did he miss? How is handing out soccer balls going to defeat coercion? It can't. At no time did anyone provide an explicit plan for how to defeat the enemy.

Instead of focusing on individuals, William concentrated on defining what it was that AQI was trying to achieve and how it was trying to achieve it.

In contrast, William very consciously avoided conducting operations simply for the sake of conducting operations. He avoided the operations–intelligence trap that many operational detachments and units fell into, when units conducted direct action operations to capture or kill insurgents. In theory, these operations were said to produce more intelligence that would lead to more operations, and so on, in a perpetual cycle. But this cycle can become a trap when not coordinated to support a greater end state. Instead of focusing on individuals, William concentrated on defining what it was that AQI was trying to achieve in ODA 555's AO, and how it was trying to achieve it. Once he figured that out, the ODA then sought to counter AQI's efforts.

William and the team's assistant operations sergeant developed a model, depicted in Figure 3, to illustrate how AQI and other anti-coalition groups were operating in Anbar. First, AQI attempted to dominate or co-opt the tribes. Second, AQI used these groups to get civic leaders and civic institutions to support their operations and to misdirect coalition forces.

For instance, the model reveals how AQI and others used Iraqi Police (IPs) in a counterintelligence role to impede coalition progress. William and ODA 555 found three types of individuals in an IP force: active insurgents, passive

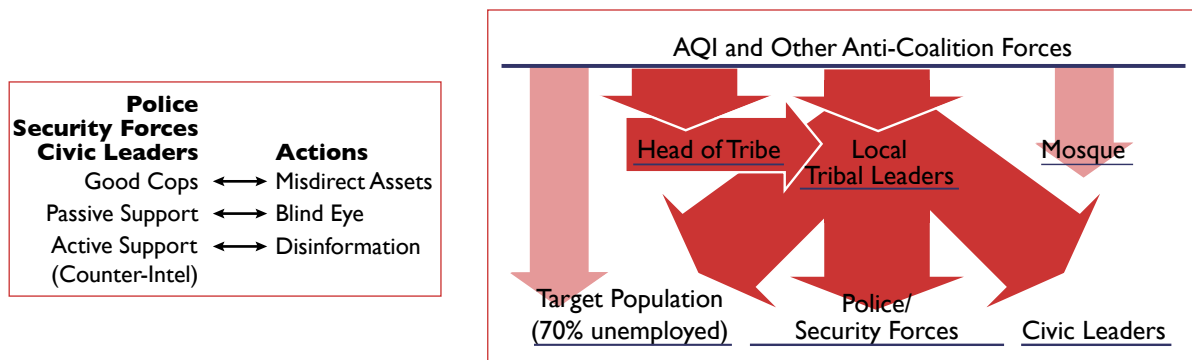


Figure 3: Counterinsurgency Model and Enemy Course of Action Template for Special Operations Area West–Juliet (January–July 2004)

supporters who simply ignored insurgent activity, and honest policemen. The active insurgents in the police force collected valuable intelligence by observing and coordinating with coalition forces. These insurgent policemen conducted counterintelligence by providing disinformation to the coalition, to the population, and to honest cops with the aim of subverting coalition stabilization efforts. The active insurgents also used unwitting, honest policemen to misdirect police efforts in support of insurgent activity.

As William's model suggests, insurgents sought to control the coalition's use of its preferred connective nodes—chiefly the police and city councils—in order to destroy coalition efforts to gain the local population's support and trust. The insurgents could thereby completely control the tempo of the fight in Anbar, and effectively parry coalition efforts to contain it. As amorphous as the insurgency was, it had few difficulties shaping coalition perceptions and affecting coalition forces' reactions to events.<sup>8</sup>

As amorphous as the insurgency was, it had few difficulties shaping coalition perceptions and affecting coalition forces' reactions to events.

By refusing to work with the IPs or the Hit city council, and by conducting tribal engagement, William disrupted AQI's ability to control the tempo of the fight in al Phurat and Hit district. Even though William started small, with just one Nimr tribesman from Tal Aswad, his influence grew. The ODA developed excellent relations with Sheikhs Reshad, Bizea, and Faisal (governor of Anbar), and others, while simultaneously developing a loyal following among the many members of the general Nimr tribe.

### Dirty Tricks

The ODA conducted other deliberate operations in support of William's main effort with the Nimr and to disrupt AQI. It created events, either to shape the battlefield, or just to see what would happen in order to test assumptions and improve its understanding of how the enemy was operating and influencing the locals.

While William did not consider Hit or other surrounding areas ripe for fruitful tribal engagement during his OIF II tour, he also did not ignore them. Because ODA 555 still had to react to intelligence leads on known insurgents and requests from "higher," William always tried to ensure that he conducted operations in ways that helped shape the battlefield toward facilitating accomplishment of his overall mission. He cleverly developed and executed concepts to influence insurgent decision cycles and insurgents' perceptions. William largely did this by mirroring their tactics.

ODA 555 conducted some operations in ways that masked its identity as the sponsor. [These] heightened insurgents' fears that the coalition and tribe were cooperating.

ODA 555 conducted some operations in ways that masked its identity as the sponsor. These operations suggested to local insurgents that there were other, unknown Iraqis living around them in their communities who supported coalition objectives. When combined with overt operational displays by the Nimr provisional company, these operations heightened insurgents' fears that the coalition and tribe were cooperating. ODA 555 also choreographed the dissemination of disinformation through informants to amplify the perception that Iraqis were rejecting AQI and the resistance.

These operations effectively created doubt and uncertainty among the insurgents, and introduced something far more threatening to them than coalition forces: They planted the idea that there were local Iraqis, whom the

The disbandment of the provisionals unquestionably affected the Nimrs' view of the coalition and cost the coalition rapport with a pro-coalition tribal community.

insurgents didn't know and couldn't identify or control, who were targeting AQI and elements of the local resistance. One of the by-products of this fear among the insurgents was an increase in reports to ODA 555 of intra-Iraqi violence—some between competing insurgent factions and some from local Iraqis defending themselves against AQI.

Sadly, despite ODA 555's best efforts, its OIF II tour did not end as expected. After the Transfer of Authority on 30 June 2004, ODA 555 lost its ability (authority, really) to continue to pay the Nimr provisional company. Consequently, the Nimr were to be absorbed into the 503rd ICDC Battalion at Camp Hit. William knew the Nimr would reject this because the 503rd was corrupt; it had also been penetrated. The Nimr realized that they would be forfeiting their tribal security net if they were integrated as Nimr individuals into extant platoons. ODA 555 protested the disbanding of the provisional unit, but to no avail.

While William and his men had developed close enough bonds with the Nimr that they were beyond Nimr reproach, the disbandment of the provisionals unquestionably affected the Nimrs' view of the coalition and the Shi'a-dominated Interim Iraqi Government. It also cost the coalition rapport with a pro-coalition tribal community. Worse, the withdrawal of Special Forces from Anbar in the fall of 2004 cemented a sense of abandonment among the Tal Aswad Nimr.

## The Interim: Putting It All Together

While William's original mission had been to exploit fissures in the insurgency in order to encourage Iraqis to reject AQI, he had, in effect, conducted counterinsurgency. William himself acknowledges that he did not mentally make the paradigmatic shift to counterinsurgency until after the end of his OIF II tour. But all this really means is that he did not step back to analyze his approach at the time, so as to give it a label. It was only when he realized the magnitude of the loss of the Nimr provisional unit that he began reassessing what his team had done. Once home, William's battalion commander asked him to activate and train a new ODA. Because William sincerely believed the key to defeating AQI and managing the national resistance lay in al Anbar, despite its relegation to an economy-of-force effort, he desperately wanted to return there. He wanted to take his new ODA with him. That ODA included me.

In the course of activating ODA 545 (in August 2004), William and I had many long discussions. He described how he was drawing from his experiences in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq to develop a tribal engagement-based counterinsurgency strategy should 545 go back to Anbar. William explained his approach using three simple models.

### Model I

William borrowed the framework for his first model directly from U.S. Army doctrine. The Army utilizes the term *Battlefield Operating Systems* (BOS) to refer to the physical means by which a force executes its concept of operations. The Army classifies these physical means into seven operating systems: intelligence, maneuver, fire support, air defense, mobility/countermobility/survivability, combat service support (CSS), and command and control.<sup>9</sup> The



U.S. Army uses these seven systems to target the enemy's operations. William simply applied the BOS overlay to insurgent forces to identify what was targetable within their systems.

Table 1 depicts what William determined to be AQI's operating systems in Anbar and what he deemed targetable. The figure shows that William regarded AQI's CSS as the only BOS worth targeting, one that could decisively lead to AQI's defeat in Anbar. The term *combat service support* refers to all of the essential activities necessary to sustain AQI and the insurgency.<sup>10</sup> In Iraq, CSS came from the population in one of two ways, either freely or via coercion and intimidation.

William regarded AQI's combat service support as the only [Battlefield Operating System] worth targeting, one that could decisively lead to AQI's defeat in Anbar.

BOS	AQ Equivalent	Targetable
Intelligence	Human assets capable of gathering information through observation, coercion, and penetration	✗
Maneuver	Able to move through and blend with the population	✗
Fire Support/Psyps	Car bombs and IEDs/imams and media	✗
Air Defense	Blending in to local populations	✗
Mobility/Counter mobility/Survivability	Able to move through and blend with the population	✗
Combat Service Support	Population	✓
Command and Control	Mosques, traveling imams and leadership	✗

Table 1: AQI Battlefield Operating Systems in Iraq

Classic counterinsurgency theory maintains that isolating insurgents from the population is necessary to defeat the insurgency. William came to the same conclusion, but from an enemy-centric perspective. He was interested in how to defeat the enemy. The remaining six systems could be targeted, but disrupting them would not be sufficient to inflict lasting damage on AQI or the insurgency.

## Model II

William used his second model to explain to others how to target the population. William says he borrowed this from something a State Department staffer told him years earlier. According to this model, Arab identity begins with the immediate family and then proceeds along the following trajectory: family, clan, tribe, Muslims-like-me, Muslims-not-like-me, national identity.

William used this model to point out that the most effective way to target Anbaris non-kinetically was through tribal engagement. Anbaris' identities begin with the family and tribe. That is why Anbaris often attach an adjectival form of their tribal name to their given name: to inform others about their familial lineage and tribe. From William's point of view, because family and tribe were so central to Anbaris' identities, tribal engagement would continue to be the most viable means by which to influence local populations in Anbar.

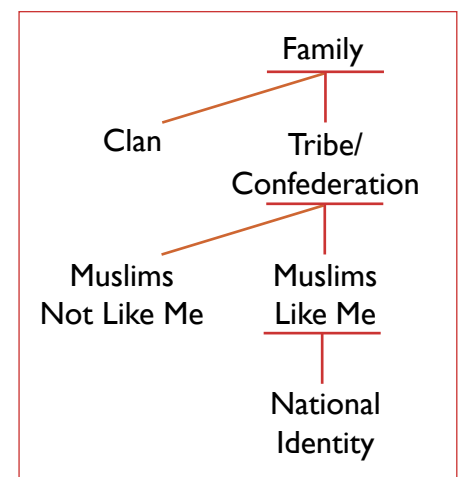


Figure 4: Trajectory of Arab Identification

### Model III

Based on his prior experiences in Somalia and Afghanistan, William determined that there were three conditions al Qaeda needed if it was to succeed in establishing an Islamic state:

1. A predominantly Muslim population
2. Social chaos (breakdown of normal societal structures)
3. Economic failure or near failure

When these conditions persist, they create a climate that so wears down the populace that people will accept whatever form of government prevails, even a Taliban-like Islamic government, so long as it brings some form of stability. For traditional societal structures to break down to the point that AQI's influence prevails requires war or some other catastrophic event.

To avoid this scenario, William considered it critical that Iraq not devolve into civil war. That meant reinforcing existing tribal structures, which was also necessary to prevent AQI from undermining them for its own purposes. Otherwise, AQI could hijack local tribal structures to serve as mobilizing structures to support its goals, while undermining or destroying those structures it couldn't hijack. From William's perspective, AQI was doing both. For example, AQI used Kharbouli tribal structures to mobilize in al Qaim, but in Ramadi AQI assassinated senior sheikhs of the Albu Fahd in order to undermine tribal leaders and make the tribe more pliant.

According to William's models, if coalition forces could out-compete AQI to obtain the support of tribal structures, that would force AQI to rely on violent coercion and repression to force tribal acquiescence. As William put it, "You want AQ to become like a cancer and start attacking the body [the population, its own base of support, or CSS]." Basically, for William, AQI-inspired violence against the tribes implied three things. First, it indicated that coalition and government forces' actions were threatening AQI. Second, it indicated that the population's goals were divergent from AQI's. And third, it signaled an opportunity to align tribal needs with coalition goals by helping those tribes secure themselves.

### The Model City Approach

William took his ideas and synthesized them into what he termed the "model city" approach, a variant of the famous inkblot or oil-slick approach to counterinsurgency. The basic premise is to gain access to a village or town by creating jobs, establishing a local security force, and using selective humanitarian or civil affairs projects to improve residents' quality of life. Once success is achieved in one location, that locality then serves as a model for surrounding tribal populations who can improve their own security and economic prospects by mimicking the model city and joining broader stabilization efforts. At the same time, any tribal leader who refuses to cooperate is denied economic and security benefits until he or his constituents choose to align themselves with the coalition and the host nation government on the side of stability.<sup>11</sup>

With this approach, it becomes possible to empower local leaders and enhance their credibility in the eyes of their communities. This, in turn,

AQI-inspired violence against the tribes signaled an opportunity to align tribal needs with coalition goals by helping those tribes secure themselves.

provides leverage as their expanding status becomes ever more tied to support of coalition objectives. In order to sustain this over the long term, coalition forces must gradually tie support for local leaders back to the local, regional, or national government. Sometimes, however, local leaders can be indirectly pressured into aligning themselves with pro-government forces.

William cites the western tribes as an example. Tribal leaders do not possess sovereign powers. They are largely “big men,” relying on prestige to influence their constituents.<sup>12</sup> In William’s words:

Picture a sheikh as if he is sitting atop a pyramid. If the base of the pyramid moves, and the sheikh wants to remain on top, then he has to move with it. This is a natural democratic aspect of the tribes that not all people understand.

Because William did understand this, he spent a great deal of time developing relationships and influence among the general Nimr population. This was his way of using *them* to manipulate the sheikhs.

One benefit of William’s model city approach is that it requires very few resources. In fact, gross overspending on civil affairs projects or any welfare-like assistance immediately undermines the entire effort. The key is to start small, spending little and under-promising on simple projects but over-performing in their completion. If the situation isn’t too far gone, William’s model city approach can also succeed with limited manpower. However, if the environment is as violent as al Qaim was in 2005, then external forces are needed to create and maintain stability until the local population is capable of doing this themselves. In areas where the violence is somewhat manageable, then even as small an element as an ODA can create security from within, working with the local inhabitants. Tal Aswad represents a prime example.

### OIF III

William and I were eager for ODA 545 to get to Anbar in June 2005 for our OIF III rotation, which would be my first as a team leader. We first had to spend two months in Baghdad, however, waiting for the CJSOTF (composed of a 5th Group headquarters) to coordinate with Multi-National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I) and II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) to re-introduce Special Forces into Anbar.

While waiting to get to al Anbar, I scoured intelligence reports and other documents for current information about the situation there. I was intrigued by reporting that indicated that nationalist groups such as Mohammed’s Army and the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade were fighting with AQI and other jihadist Salafist organizations. This information substantiated what William discovered during his OIF II mission. In our view, the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade represented an entity that could be redirected against irreconcilable groups like AQI. William also met some Nimr soldiers from Tal Aswad serving in Baghdad. They told us that they would soon desert because AQI threatened to harm their family members back home as payback for their having joined the army. This information further fueled our desire to leverage local fissures.

Tribal leaders do not possess sovereign powers. They are largely “big men,” relying on prestige to influence their constituents.

[William] spent a great deal of time developing influence among the general Nimr population. This was his way of using *them* to manipulate the sheikhs.

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When ODA 545 finally made it to Anbar in August, we chose to establish our teamhouse at Camp Hit due to its proximity to al Phurat. Ideally, we would have established a teamhouse in al Phurat, but we did not know how receptive the Nimr would be to our presence, given William's absence and Sheikh Reshad's death. Marines mistakenly killed Sheikh Reshad while he was fleeing a kidnapping attempt in early 2005. Because we did not know exactly where we stood with the Nimr, and because we knew that if we had simply driven straight to Zuwayyah to meet with the sheikhs they would have presented us with a long list of grievances, William instead engineered a way to bring the sheikhs to us, working with the battlespace owners, 3–25 Marines. 3–25 Marines, a Marine Reserve Battalion from Ohio, were responsible for the ERV from Hit to Haditha.

During a combat patrol shortly after we arrived in Hit, 3–25 Marines detained several members of the Burgess family.<sup>13</sup> Members of the al Gaaoud family, including the late Sheikh Reshad's brother, Sheikh Anis, came to Camp Hit to inquire about their cousins, the Burgesses. In an effort to re-cement cordial relations with the Nimr, William protested the Burgesses' detainment on the al Gaaouds' behalf. He worked this out in advance with 3–25 so that the 3–25 operations officer would appear publicly to relent, but not without loudly protesting first. By securing the Burgesses' release, William was able to reestablish himself as an important advocate for the Nimr and a person of influence.

### Ghost Patrols

Hit district was much more violent in August 2005 than it had been during OIF II. When we arrived, there were no police. The 503rd ICDC/ING had disintegrated earlier that year, and several of 3–25's combat patrols suffered suicide vehicle born improvised explosive devices (SVBIED) attacks prior to our arrival.<sup>14</sup> The ODA received grim reports from multiple informants that the entire situation in al Anbar was rapidly deteriorating. AQI blew up the Telecom cell tower servicing Hit district and the surrounding areas in the latter part of August, and the Albu Nimr reported an increase in threats, night letters, and attacks against Nimr tribesmen.<sup>15</sup> The majority of the Albu Nimr tribe in the Hit district lived on the northeastern side of the Euphrates where there was no permanent coalition presence. It appeared that AQI was conducting shaping operations to isolate the Nimr side of the river.

On the morning of 4 September 2005, AQI conducted a multi-pronged SVBIED attack against a Marine firm base in Hit.<sup>16</sup> AQI also simultaneously detonated an SVBIED on the Hit bridge, the only trafficable bridge over the Euphrates between Ramadi and Haditha. The SVBIED rendered the bridge impassable to vehicle traffic and effectively isolated the only pro-coalition tribal communities in the area, all of whom resided on the far side of the Euphrates from the Marine bases. Effectively, the Nimr were now on their own. The Nimr tribe's last line of defense was a loosely organized home guard militia that patrolled the tribal area looking for outsiders.

The Hit bridge remained closed to vehicular traffic for three months, and for three months coalition forces were absent from the Nimr tribal areas on the far side of the river. During this time, ODA 545 drove down through Ramadi where we could cross the Euphrates and drive back up the river to al Phurat. We lived in the desert for a week at a time, traveling across the *jazeera*

Hit district was much more violent in August 2005 than it had been. The ODA received grim reports that the entire situation in al Anbar was rapidly deteriorating.



between Thar Thar Lake and the Euphrates River to avoid IEDs and ambushes and to maximize the range of our weapons.<sup>17</sup> We “ghosted” out of the *jazeera* at different times and along different vectors to visit villages and towns along the river and maintain relations with the Nimr tribe. Each time we did so, we traveled with elements of the 1A battalion also stationed at Camp Hit.

We also conducted numerous combat patrols north along the river to maintain some sort of presence. Communities outside of the Nimr tribal area in al Phurat were mostly small and tribally heterogeneous. The people in these communities lacked a significant tribal security net that could protect them and, as a result, they were very cautious when the ODA patrolled through. A school principal from Dulab finally admitted to us that the coalition would never receive any cooperation without providing constant security to the villages. The people, he said, would support the insurgents because the insurgents were there constantly, whereas coalition and Iraqi security forces only patrolled through occasionally.

William modified his model city approach based on this information and other observations. We concluded that the most important thing we could do was to establish a solid base of support among the Albu Nimr in al Phurat. Al Phurat was the largest, most powerful homogeneous tribal area between Ramadi and Haditha, and if we made it our base of support, we would prevent AQI from using it for the same purposes. After securing al Phurat, we planned to methodically spread our tentacles through the smaller, tribal communities surrounding Hit, thereby choking the area off before finally securing it with indigenous support.

Typical western counterinsurgency practice often starts with the urban centers and spreads outward. The situation in Hit district dictated the opposite. Hit became an alternate safe haven for insurgents fleeing Fallujah in November 2004, though it had actually been a sanctuary long before that.<sup>18</sup> Hit’s tribally heterogeneous population made the city vulnerable to incursions by AQI. Outsiders could hide in Hit much more easily than they could in the rural tribal areas. Consequently, if we had begun our counterinsurgency effort in Hit, we would have been pitting our weaknesses against the enemy’s strengths. The enemy had the informational advantage, was hidden among the population, and had the strength of position. An under-resourced counterinsurgency effort in Hit would have resulted in coalition casualties, civilian casualties, and collateral damage that would only have contributed to AQI’s information operations (IO) since, as William noted, every coalition or Iraqi Security Force (ISF) casualty was an IO victory for the enemy.

William’s plan to circumvent Hit and work through the tribes redounded to our credit. Once we were in the area, it was clear that starting the model city/inkblot approach with Tal Aswad—not Hit—was the only way to proceed. The model city approach let us control the tempo, use the desert to avoid casualties and collateral damage, target the enemy’s CSS, and gain the informational advantage. Perhaps not surprisingly, our biggest obstacle turned out to be not AQI, but the fact that the bridge remained closed for three months and the coalition persisted in neglecting the only tribal communities that were somewhat pro-coalition.

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## The Albu Nimr Desert Protectors

In October 2005, shortly after the Desert Protector (DP) program was initiated in al Qaim with the Albu Mahal, MNC-I and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense decided to stand up an Albu Nimr cohort in al Phurat. ODA 545 was tasked through command channels to support this initiative and recruit 200 Desert Protectors from the tribe. 2-114 Field Artillery of the Mississippi National Guard, the Hit battlespace owners at the time, were tasked to support the recruitment as well.<sup>19</sup> But the situation near Hit differed considerably from the situation in al Qaim. Unlike the Mahal, the Albu Nimr were not suffering a perceived existential threat from AQI. The Nimr were also very cognizant of the implosion of the Iraqi National Guard and IPs along the upper Euphrates River Valley. In the fall of 2004, insurgents had overrun the IP station in Haditha, and many of the IPs who surrendered were taken out and murdered on the town's soccer field.<sup>20</sup> The Nimr did not trust the coalition, and often cited this incident as proof that working with coalition and government forces didn't pay.

The government and the coalition wanted the Nimr to trust the state with their menfolk. But what did they offer in return?

What made matters worse was that the coalition and the Iraqi government, on the one hand, would not reopen the Hit bridge or station troops on the Albu Nimr side of the river. On the other hand, the government and the coalition wanted the Nimr to trust the state with their menfolk and send them off for training. But what did they offer in return? William and I were caught in the middle. We wanted to recruit a tribal force and use it as a means to build confidence between the Nimr and the government, but were essentially being told to do so with no quid pro quo from the government or the coalition. Kasam, Sheikh Reshad's 20-something-year-old son and heir, trusted us. But even he was reluctant to commit to the Desert Protectors.

It took some deft cajoling before ODA 545 eventually received Kasam's support, along with 200 recruits. The original MNC-I plan called for rotary-wing aircraft from the Marine Air Wing at al Asad to transport the recruits to Camp Fallujah for training.<sup>21</sup> RCT 2 tasked 2-114 FA to establish the landing zones and provide security for both the landing zones and the recruits. As 2-114 waited for the helicopters to arrive, it received word that the Marine Air Wing would not send aircraft until the following day, due to scheduled maintenance. That night, insurgents operating on the far banks of the Euphrates mortared several Nimr villages. In response, the Nimr decided that they could not afford to lose 200 able-bodied fighting men to 30 days of basic training in Fallujah. In the end, they provided 30 men while the remainder returned to defend their villages. Unfortunately, the Marines and MNC-I viewed this as evidence that the sheikhs were unable to rally support for tribal units and that the people were unwilling to follow their sheikhs.

## Keeping It Together

In the wake of such setbacks, it amazes me that the people of al Phurat remained friendly to our ODA. This was largely due to William's efforts and his legacy. He had established a remarkable reputation as a friend of the Nimr, a man of his word, and a warrior. William's reputation further grew during our three trying months of living in the desert, out of trucks, which he insisted we do to maintain relations with the tribe. This act of

commitment was vital to countering the Nimr's growing sense of despair regarding the coalition.

By September 2005, it appeared to the Nimr that the coalition was losing. The Nimr were well aware of the situation in al Qaim where their Mahal cousins were being pummeled. They knew about the murder and intimidation of the IPs and ICDC/ING along the ERV. And they had more than a passing familiarity with the growing levels of violence elsewhere in the province. Between the disbandment of the Nimr provisional company at the end of OIF II, the coalition's inability to reopen the Hit bridge, the lack of coalition presence, and growing unemployment, events seemed to belie whatever positive spin the coalition tried to put on its efforts.

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But then, in November, the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) temporarily reinforced RCT 2. RCT 2 tasked the MEU to secure Hit in preparation for the December 2005 parliamentary elections and to repair and reopen the Hit bridge to coalition vehicle traffic. The 13th MEU, following our recommendation, sent some of its forces around through Ramadi and back up the river to clear the far side, instead of repairing and punching directly across the bridge.<sup>22</sup> On 2 December, we led these clearing forces in, but did so by guiding them around the Nimr areas so that they could begin clearing operations in the town of Hai al Bekr (the local name for the town directly opposite Hit across the Euphrates). The 13th MEU, fresh from al Qaim where fighting had been house to house in some areas, took no chances. AQI had booby trapped some houses near al Qaim with IEDs and dug fighting positions into others. The MEU ordered residents to vacate their homes and to leave their doors open to facilitate the Marines' clearing efforts. Marines escorted citizens to holding areas until the town was cleared.

William convinced Sheikh Kasam that it was only thanks to the ODA's influence that the Marines finally reopened the bridge. We also told Sheikh Kasam the truth—that it was the ODA that determined that the MEU's clearing operations would begin in Hai al Bekr, and that only his tribe's friendly relations with us had spared the Nimr the inconvenience of being turned out of their homes. We designed the operation this way to deepen the trust between the ODA and the Nimr, as well as to communicate to the surrounding communities that it was best to work with us and the coalition, and through their Desert Protectors.

We also told Sheikh Kasam the truth that only his tribe's friendly relations with us had spared the Nimr being turned out of their homes.

The 30 Nimr DPs returned from their training in Fallujah a week before the 13th MEU's operation to clear Hai al Bekr and reopen the bridge. All of the DPs knew William from his OIF II rotation; he had instant rapport with them, and it didn't take long for the rest of the ODA to want to train and advise the DPs.

William and I made every effort to use our influence to tie the Nimr to the national government in as many ways as possible. As William noted, the more we could do to align the Nimr with the government, the more fruitful our counterinsurgency efforts would be. In this regard, we spent our last two months in Iraq pursuing three different lines of approach.

First, we began soliciting Sheikh Kasam, Kasam's influential family members, and other tribal leaders to support the December 2005 elections. Fortunately,

The DPs were our information operations. [They] highlighted the benefits of working with the coalition and the Iraqi government.

the Sunni community, aware that boycotting the January 2005 elections had been a grave misstep, and encouraged by the Association of Muslim Scholars and by Sunni nationalists, were enthusiastic to vote. Also, with the bridge open and the 22nd MEU providing security, the residents of Hit district felt much more secure going to the polls.<sup>23</sup> Sheikh Kasam's cousin, Hasan, arranged a convoy of approximately 20 vans at William's behest to ferry rural Nimr voters to the Hit bridge so that they could walk across and vote. ODA 545 and the DPs provided security at the loading point in al Phurat and escorted numerous convoys carrying approximately 1,500 voters to Hit.

Second, we attempted to capitalize on the popular goodwill that surged in the wake of the Nimr-DP connection, the enhanced security environment established by the MEUs, and Sunni participation in the 15 December elections. The DPs *were* our information operations. They let it be known that *they* helped the ODA guide the 13th MEU around—instead of through—their home villages, which built instant credibility for the DP program and highlighted the benefits of working with the coalition and the Iraqi government.

It was our intent that the Nimr community see the DPs acting unilaterally—which they did. For instance, the night before the elections, the DPs engaged in a firefight with insurgents trying to make their way across the river from Mohammedi into al Phurat. In the eyes of the local Nimr, the Desert Protectors lived up to their name. Together, all of this resulted in an outpouring of public support. In the weeks following the election, hundreds of young Nimr men clamoring to be DPs besieged the ODA whenever we went to al Phurat.<sup>24</sup>

Following the election, hundreds of young Nimr men clamoring to be DPs besieged the ODA whenever we went to al Phurat.

William negotiated intensely with Sheikh Kasam, his uncle Sheikh Anis, Sheikh Bizea, and others to find ways to channel the post-election goodwill. For instance, the Nimr and other tribes wanted to form an Army division consisting solely of Sunnis (and preferably of Anbaris) to operate in al Anbar. Sheikhs Kasam and Bizea reported to us that they, and a coalition of other sheikhs, approached the Iraqi government through Saadoun al-Dulaimi (spelled Sadun Dulaymi in William Knarr's article), the Minister of Defense, on this matter. We all recognized, however, that the government would probably not be able to address local desires in a sufficiently timely manner. Consequently, we requested a mobile recruiting team, the same kind of team the Ministry of Defense had dispatched to al Phurat to recruit the Desert Protectors. This time, however, no mobile recruiting team arrived. Worse, the sheikhs' prediction that it was too dangerous for Nimr from al Phurat to travel to recruitment centers in Ramadi proved true when nine Nimr were killed on 5 January 2006 during IP recruitment at the glass factory in Ramadi.<sup>25</sup>

### End of the Tour

William predicted that, given our election success, we would see increased threats, violence, and intimidation inspired by AQI and directed towards Iraqis working with us. One of the DPs who lived on the outer edges of Tal Aswad along a tribal border area quit because unknown insurgents, coming from outside the tribal area, threatened his family. Several night letters listing names of some of the DPs surfaced in Tal Aswad. Despite these threats, and despite being unpaid for the months of December and January, the DPs continued to work. Apparently arrangements for paying the DPs were undermined from



within the Ministry of Defense, or simply broke down thanks to ineptness and inefficiency.

Both the Nimr and the Mahal DP programs in al Qaim routinely suffered from pay problems. Even so, in both locations, most DPs continued to serve with distinction. We did what we could, within our means, to help support our DPs. The DPs, in turn, never publicly let on that they were not being paid. Several of the DPs approached William and explained that they had unanimously decided to not reveal the problem or other frustrations because they would have been ridiculed for working with coalition forces. The DPs also indicated that their actions were guided by wanting to preserve the unit. They were proud to be Desert Protectors.<sup>26</sup>

The DPs never publicly let on that they were not being paid. They were proud to be Desert Protectors.

William was the first to notice and comment on another trend that we believed signaled success in our efforts to undermine AQI. Increased community support from the Nimr, and increased cooperation with the Gaaouds' leaders during the months of December 2005 and January 2006, corresponded with increased negative reporting about certain individuals working with us. We had no doubt that some of the identified individuals had direct links to segments of the resistance, and possibly indirect links to AQI through past associations, but that was the very reason we worked with them. Other individuals were simply our patrons among the Nimr who were indispensable to our tribal engagement activities. Our association with all of these individuals was by design. The spikes in negative reporting against some of them seemed to indicate that AQI was waging a counterintelligence effort aimed at derailing our tribal engagement activities.

The enemy was well aware of coalition forces' practice of using informants. It is naïve to think that by late 2005 coalition information-gathering networks were intact and had not been compromised. Whether accusations were legitimate or not, we were often forced to redirect time and energy to protect some of our people from coalition targeting in response to the reports against them. We had to do this both to protect our sources of information and, even more important, to preserve our relationship with the tribe. Though these events created headaches, they were, in accordance with William's assessment, indicators that we had successfully targeted AQI's CSS system and disrupted its operations.

[Reports against informants] were indicators that we had successfully targeted AQI's CSS system and disrupted its operations.

The last positive thing to come out of our deployment was the sanctioning of the Zuwayyah police department. We made a determined effort to get an unpaid police force that the Nimr maintained in Zuwayyah sanctioned by the government. There were multiple reasons we sought to do this. First was the simple fact that police, because of their relations with the locals, were the most appropriate force for conducting counterinsurgency, as opposed to the army. Second was to provide jobs. The police were an economical way to tie a segment of the Nimr to the local, regional, and national governments. Third, a tribally homogenous police force, if carefully developed, would be resistant to insurgent intimidation and infiltration. At the time, we strongly believed that any attempt to recruit police in Hit, or any other location in Hit district, would fail. Lastly, a local police force would have legitimacy in the eyes of local communities, whereas the predominantly Shi'a Iraqi Army battalion in Hit did not.

ODA 545 members often joked that [Robert] could “out-Iraqi” an Iraqi.

The Civilian Police Assistance Training Team (CPATT) was a subordinate command of the Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC-I). CPATT was responsible for the development of civil police forces within Iraq, and we learned that the CPATT was going to open two new police departments in al Anbar. These would be the only departments outside of the coalition’s heavy concentrations of forces in Ramadi and al Qaim. My team’s warrant officer, Chief Pitt, formed a valuable relationship with the regional International Police Liaison Officers’ (IPLO) office in al Asad. The IPLOs were policemen contracted by the U.S. State Department to work with CPATT. Chief Pitt identified the IPLO administrator responsible for assessing prospective locations for the two new police departments and invited him to our teamhouse. We escorted the officer to Zuwayyah to observe ongoing security efforts and to meet some of the sheikhs. Our efforts resulted in al Zuwayyah being nominated as one of the two new departments in al Anbar. This was good news because it ensured that the coalition forces, along with the ODA replacing us (ODA 182), would have to commit time and resources to Zuwayyah, al Phurat, and the Nimr, thus locking them into furthering William’s model city concept and diverting them from wasting all their resources on pursuing a losing strategy in Hit.

### Robert’s War<sup>27</sup>

Robert had 12 consecutive years serving in 2nd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group, when he replaced William, who retired shortly after OIF III. Robert had not only visited every country within CENTCOM’s area of responsibility, but spoke excellent Arabic and had an unusually good sense of the Iraqi people.<sup>28</sup> In fact, ODA 545 members often joked that he could “out-Iraqi” an Iraqi. He most likely acquired this ability during his previous three tours. Robert had spent much of OIF II and III conducting intelligence-gathering activities, which required him to live and work with a small group of trusted Iraqis. Both the battalion commander and the battalion operations officer, the same two individuals who had such high confidence in William, specifically picked Robert to be William’s replacement as the team sergeant of ODA 545.

Like William, Robert had a “third eye” that enabled him to mentally strip away the nonessentials and effectively solve problems.

First impressions could suggest that Robert was William’s diametric opposite. William has a direct, in-your-face quality about him, whereas Robert is much more subtle. William taught the young guys on the team by example; Robert’s approach was more Socratic. William was brusque, confrontational, and always shot straight to the heart of an issue. He could instantly assess a situation, discard all irrelevant information, and then define the problem and its solution in simple, irrefutable terms. Like William, Robert had a “third eye” that enabled him to mentally strip away the nonessentials and effectively solve problems, but their approaches with people were considerably different. Rather than present people with an irrefutable answer, Robert would instead lead them in conversations, manipulating their own arguments and logic to help them arrive at conclusions he had already formed. In short, Robert was a master of “mental jujitsu.”

### OIF IV

ODA 545 returned to Hit in August 2006 for our OIF IV rotation. Much to our relief, we found that ODA 182 and the current battlespace owners—an

Army battalion, 1-36 Infantry—had continued to work with the al Zuwayyah police.<sup>29</sup> When we left Iraq in January 2006, we had only a promise that CPATT would commit resources and IPLOs to open the Zuwayyah IP station. CPATT had not only fulfilled that promise, sanctioning the Zuwayyah IPs and providing the authorization and resources to activate the station, but ODA 182 took ownership of the fledgling force and acted as the Police Transition Team (PTT) until an official PTT arrived to take 182's place. This coincided with our arrival.

PTTs were the police version of Military Transition Teams, or MiTTs. MiTTs consisted of 12–15 soldiers or Marines assigned to advise Iraqi Army units. PTTs did the same, but with the police. One difference was that PTTs usually worked with civilian counterparts. These civilians were law enforcement professionals from the United States working under contract for the State Department's IPLO program. They provided necessary real-world expertise about how to develop and run functioning police departments. Unfortunately, the relationship between MiTTs, PTTs, the Iraqi security units, and conventional forces was convoluted and bears explaining.

1-36 was the battlespace owner for Hit district. This meant that 1-36 was responsible for managing all aspects of the war within that battlespace. Units such as ODAs 182 and 545, or Marine Force Recon, who were outside entities, were required to coordinate their activities in the battlespace with 1-36. This arrangement existed to harmonize units' activities, synergize efforts, and prevent fratricide. 1-36 was also responsible for supporting and partnering with Iraqi security forces operating within its AO, whether these were Iraqi Army (IA) or Iraqi Police—which is where it gets interesting. The MiTTs and PTTs belonged to separate chains of command within MNSTC-I, which is who they reported to and took orders from. The MiTTs and PTTs were responsible for coordinating their activities with 1-36, however, because 1-36 was responsible for the Iraqi security forces as their coalition partners.

ODA 182 did well getting the al Phurat IPs started, but it was 1-36 that aggressively expanded the IP program. 1-36 opened an IP station in Tal Aswad, another in Hai al Bkr, and a third in Kubaysa. 1-36 followed William's tribal model for recruitment, using the Albu Nimr, and established stations in coalition-friendly tribal areas.<sup>30</sup> Kubaysa was the weird exception.

Kubaysa is a small town that sits alone in the desert, about 20 kilometers west of Hit. It was long considered an insurgent haven but, unlike Hit, it wasn't very violent. William and I intentionally neglected Kubaysa during OIF III because the people weren't very friendly and we did not have adequate contacts through whom to facilitate building a meaningful relationship. The IPs in Kubaysa were far less reliable than the Nimr IPs, but 1-36, like William, wanted to do everything possible to isolate Hit.

The situation in Hit was grim. Parts of what had once been a small teeming city along the Euphrates were devastated. The following passage, taken from a letter by Captain Robert Secher, a Marine advisor to the IA, paints the picture:

Hit is a lawless town with most of the fight in the north (the insurgents control/influence the southern part)... As we convoyed at

1-36 followed William's tribal model for recruitment and established stations in coalition-friendly tribal areas. Kubaysa was the weird exception.

The situation in Hit was grim. Parts of what had once been a small teeming city along the Euphrates were devastated.

high speeds thru the town (speed is the best defense against IEDs) you could clearly see the look on [sic] the eyes of the people: sick and tired. First, a generation of Saddam, now insurgents and occupiers. Everyone makes promises and no one keeps them.<sup>31</sup>

Captain Secher was killed by a sniper on 8 October 2006, while patrolling in Hit.

Insurgents repeatedly opened or blew up water mains to keep the street flooded in order to conceal IEDs and landmines.

Route Mavericks was the main thoroughfare from the highway, known as Route Bronze, through the northern part of the city and across the Hit Bridge to Hai al Bekr village. Route Mavericks was anchored on one end at Traffic Circle 1 (where it intersected Highway 12, a.k.a. Route Bronze) by a permanent, company-size combat outpost, Firm Base 1. Mavericks was anchored on the other end, at the bridgehead, by a small combat outpost, COP 3, whose job it was to protect the approach to and from the bridge. The road itself, once made of asphalt, was ground to dust by tracked vehicles and was constantly flooded, creating sewage-filled goo sometimes three feet deep. Insurgents repeatedly opened or blew up water mains to keep the street flooded in order to conceal IEDs and landmines.

When we arrived in August 2006, convoys moving down Mavericks had to be escorted by armor because of the ever-present threat of attack or IEDs. Armor provided not only firepower to deter any attacks but also thermal imaging devices useful in detecting IEDs. All of the buildings and shops along Route Mavericks and the riverfront near COP 3 were abandoned, most of them damaged by fighting, and some destroyed. These areas had once comprised the main commercial center of the city. As William knew it would, Hit represented an insufficient counterinsurgency effort that ended in violence,

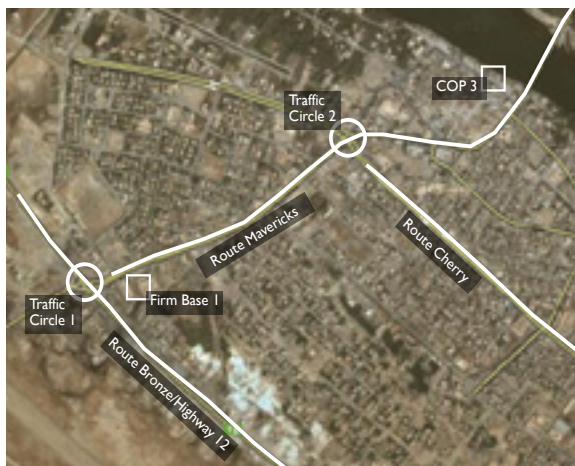


Figure 5: Hit

destruction, and death, all reinforcing an image of strength for the insurgency and weakness for the coalition. To be fair, 1-36 did not create the situation so much as inherit it. Five different units had been responsible for the Hit area of operations in just the six months prior to 1-36's arrival.

However, things were bad not only in Hit. The situation appeared bleak all across al Anbar. The MEF G-2 released a now-famous intelligence report the month we arrived that declared the province lost to the insurgency. The personnel we encountered at RCT 7 headquarters in al Asad and at 1-36



headquarters at Camp Hit did not necessarily echo or share this assessment. But it was evident to us by their demeanors that the situation in the AO wasn't good, and that they were tired.

Like William, Robert had spent many nights before the tour mulling over the situation we would likely face in Hit. William had shared all of his thoughts and theories with Robert, and Robert conducted his own extensive preparation, studying reports about the individuals and personalities we would be dealing with and strategizing how best to counter the insurgents' efforts in Hit.

This road (Figure 6) had been paved prior to our OIF IV tour. It was reduced to mud and rubble by the constant passage of coalition tracked vehicles and exploding IEDs. Sometimes the insurgents were patient enough to slowly drag land mines into place utilizing string or twine in order to avoid being identified.

### Robert's Spin

Robert used William's concept of targeting AQI's combat service support. "Third-party neutral" was the term he used to describe segments of the population that were not ideologically committed to the insurgency. Third-party neutrals consisted of tribal elites and common people alike who remained guarded and were fence sitters waiting to commit to the winning side—and who made their choices based on who seemed most able to ensure their survival.

The following diagram (Figure 7) is my attempt to graphically depict Robert's thoughts and ideas at the time. Robert used this diagram to brief our battalion commander about our concept for counterinsurgency in July 2006, prior to our August deployment.

Robert explained the diagram this way:



Our bottom line is to influence the third-party neutral, the fence sitters. We believe, based on experience and conversations with Iraqis during the last tour, that the third-party neutral makes up the majority of the population, even in Anbar. We have to somehow mobilize these people to support our goals.



Figure 6: Looking Down Route Mavericks at Traffic Circle 2, Hit

“We will be like the Gray Ghost. We will treat people fairly and honestly. However, it must be clear to all that we are men of action.”



Notice the bullet at the bottom center of the slide. It begins with the phrase, “...the destruction in a given area of the insurgent forces and their political organization...” Destruction isn’t necessarily kinetic; it is by any means possible. Some insurgents will have to be killed, but most others have to be brought to the table. We have to redirect their energies towards something useful for us. A lot of these guys have legitimate grievances that we need to let them air out. If we do this and sway the third-party neutral, then we can isolate the irreconcilables. The Iraqis will do it for us.

The first row depicts the assets available to us. We have indigenous assets such as the different security forces and our informants. The diamond in the center represents an office that doesn’t yet exist. It doesn’t really have a real name yet. OBC stands for “Office of Bitches and Complaints.” This is an idea we have, to provide an opportunity for the reconcilables to address their grievances.

In an ideal world, we get them to use litigation to pursue their goals as a peaceful process of contesting the government. But Iraq isn’t there yet. Instead, we want to open a local office where people can formally declare their grievances and engage in an open dialogue. Realistically, this will start with us, the ODA, spending hours at a time sitting in the *diwaniya* [meeting house] hearing out the sheikhs and other mouthpieces for the insurgency. But eventually, we’d like to formalize the process. The remaining third of the row depicts the assets available to us through the coalition.

The second row depicts our ways or methods of engaging the population. Simple and straightforward. We want to maximize use of

all available ways. The tribes named below are the tribes that we initially plan on engaging, but, of course, as opportunities arise we will branch out to other tribes.

The third row depicts our physical target environment, the towns and villages where these tribes predominantly live.

The bottom row requires explanation. Gaining the support of the population, isolating insurgents, and killing the really bad ones isn’t going to

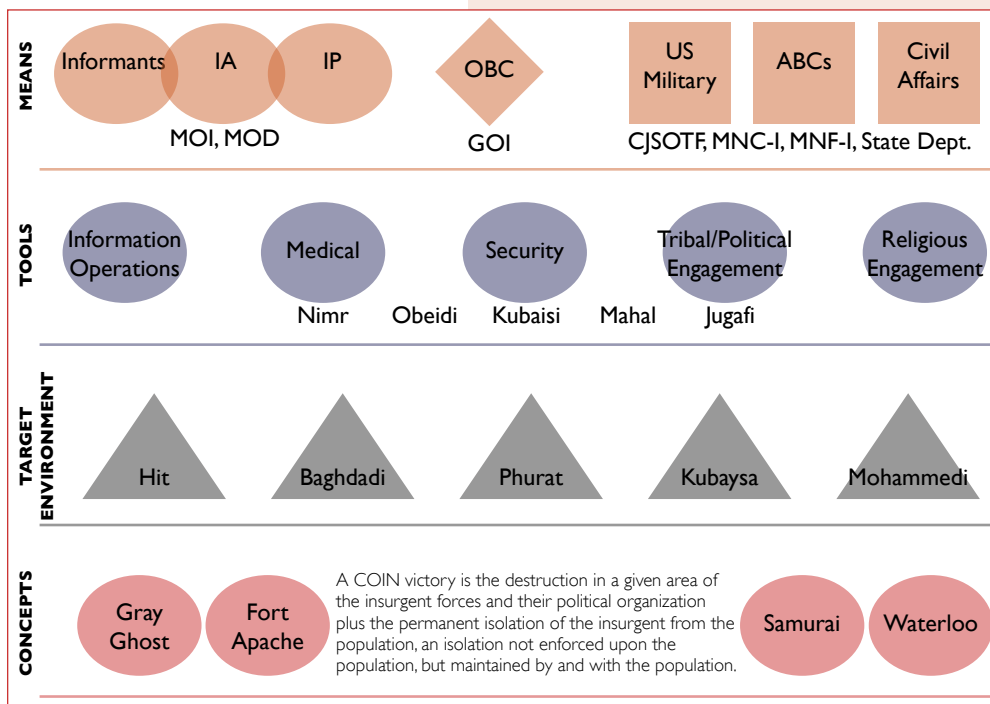


Figure 7: Targeting the Third Party Neutral (COIN)

“unfold in a neat, linear way. It’s going to occur at different times in different places. Some populations, like the Nimr, will be an easier sell than other populations. These four circles represent some abstract goals that we seek to achieve that are both a part of the process and indicators that we are succeeding.

*Gray Ghost* refers to John Mosby.<sup>32</sup> Mosby did his best to accord himself with honor. He built a tremendous reputation in the [U.S.] South, and when Union soldiers came looking for Mosby, he and his men just blended in among the people. No one turned them in. People respected him, but they also feared him because he was a man of action, a characteristic inseparable from his sense of honor.

How does this translate to us? We will be like the Gray Ghost. We will treat people fairly and honestly. We want Iraqis everywhere, even in the most virulent anti-coalition communities, to know us, and to say, “You know what, I hate Americans, but those guys have always been fair and honest with us.” We want friendly communities to openly support us, and we want fence sitters to come to our side. However, it must be clear to all that we are men of action. We will resort to violence and kill people when the situation calls for it. We are dangerous.

*Fort Apache*.<sup>33</sup> There may be places where we need to force the insurgents’ hand. We do this by establishing a security presence. We do it ourselves, in partnership with ISF, or through tribal surrogates, but we emplace ourselves where it disrupts the insurgents. They now have to factor us into their calculations. No matter how bad it gets, if we do this, we have to stick it out. We stay, we win. If we leave, the insurgents win.

*Samurai*. We’ll do this through ISF, the tribes, or both. The bottom line: We want Iraqis to start helping themselves and taking the fight to AQI and other irreconcilables on their own. We are going to make our own samurai who do this.

*Waterloo*. We want to create conditions and shape the battlefield so that we cannot be defeated. We want to bring the reconcilables to our side and isolate the remainder of the insurgency so it can be defeated.<sup>34</sup>

“[We may] need to force the insurgents’ hand. No matter how bad it gets we have to stick it out. We stay, we win. If we leave, the insurgents win.”

Robert also recognized that in spite of the “badness” all the “goodness” in those areas could be attributed to consistency of effort over several years.

Probably the most important thing that Robert did, or did not do, was to not reject William’s ideas. Robert recognized the validity of William’s ideas, especially William’s model city approach. Robert also recognized that in spite of the “badness” all around al Phurat and Hai al Bkr, all the “goodness” in those areas could be attributed to consistency of effort over several years.

Robert’s concepts weren’t new, nor did they change anything. Instead, they reflected his way of relating to the situation and continuing the general scheme that William had outlined in 2004: We would continue utilizing tribal engagement to create secure and stable communities that could be expanded over time, thereby squeezing out the insurgents.

Robert's own assessment:

*Friendly:*

Some commanders are so caught up in what they are doing that they cannot see the situation for what it is. They rely on whatever they've been trained. They forget what makes them a human being and how they do everything else in their life. They don't think problems through.

*Enemy:*

AQI thought the Sunni population was ripe for exploiting against the Americans. They took them for granted and began violating or disregarding tribal and social norms and traditions, like influencing the young people against the sheikhs.

AQI didn't believe creating chaos would bring the people to them, but creating chaos for the Americans, by hitting the Americans, they were bringing the people to them.

Robert is fond of reminding people that in the Army's five-paragraph operations order, "situation" precedes "mission." In Robert's view, too many units determined a course of action, or mission statement, without fully grasping or understanding their situation or the operational environment, and, worse still, continued to execute the mission statement with complete disregard for the situation.

Robert did not presume that he or anyone on ODA 545 fully understood the situation in Hit district even though the team had operated there just six months prior, with many team members on their third and fourth tours in Iraq. Under Robert's guidance, we therefore spent the first month reorienting. We drove all over the AO. Robert wanted to see every part of it and meet with and get a sense of the locals in each area. Robert and I spent hours reacquainting ourselves with the Nimr; talking to and getting advice from 1-36's commander, operations officer, and staff; and observing 1-36's activities. When we weren't doing this, Robert and I dug through past reporting and made our team do the same.

Our honest appraisal of the situation was that the insurgents were winning in Hit. Coalition forces maintained a base of support in the Nimr tribal area of al Phurat, but everywhere else things were bad. 1-36 ended its tour with 24 soldiers killed in action and a great many more wounded, not counting ISF or civilian casualties.<sup>35</sup> 1-36 was losing M1A1 Abrams and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles to huge IEDs. Civilians who cooperated with or provided information to coalition forces were killed. The sniper threat was so dangerous that after Captain Secher was killed, 1-36 and the IA stopped conducting cordon and searches in daylight.

When an insurgent sniper killed an American, an ISF member, or any Iraqi cooperating with the Americans, reporting often attributed it to insurgents' intimidation efforts or random violence directed against coalition and Iraqi forces. Robert's assessment was that the insurgency had reached a point where insurgents were committing violent acts against the coalition not by design, but simply because they were cocky. He was infuriated that 1-36 continued to

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engage Hit's civic leaders. It was obvious to him that the insurgency owned Hit's civic leaders. He questioned, why, after years of making no progress in Hit, coalition forces thought they should keep working with the same civic leaders. In Robert's estimation, coalition forces were empowering the very people who had already been fighting them far too long.

Robert's most direct criticism of I-36 was that the commander did not divide the insurgents into those who were reconcilable and those who were irreconcilable. The I-36 commander's failure to do so led him to continue talking with entities who were reportedly, and in some cases known to be, irreconcilables like Sheikh Yassin who was consistently alleged to have Salafist ties to Ansar al-Sunna.<sup>36</sup> As Robert said, "You can't be friends with everyone; that's not how you win counterinsurgency."

In our experience, coalition commanders were too unwilling to cast unfavorable characters aside, to treat irreconcilables as obstacles, or to bypass hard-core insurgent communities. We would run into this reluctance when we tried to cut the insurgent-controlled Hit city council out of the picture. Robert called people with such inflexible attitudes "Ameri-can'ts"; in Robert-speak, there was nothing worse than being an Ameri-can't.

In August 2006, the insurgency was definitely stronger than the counterinsurgency in Hit. The enemy owned the city and the city council. The enemy owned the roads. Insurgents took away the coalition's freedom of maneuver in town through the use of snipers and IEDs. And, thanks to IEDs, the enemy also took away the coalition's freedom of maneuver on all the major lines of communication. The police were not being properly funded and resourced by the Iraqi government. And the IA battalion in Hit was vastly under-strength.

## Execution

I will tell Robert's story within the framework of these three lines of operation, but it is necessary to bear in mind that the tour unfolded in a non-linear, sometimes circular manner as we navigated towards our end state.

So, what was our end state? Truth be told, William had always had a mental picture of something exactly like the Awakening happening. I can say this because I, along with everyone else on his teams, listened to him describe this during the latter half of 2004 and through all of 2005. It didn't take much for William to transmit this same vision to Robert. For almost two years, we all thought in Awakening-like terms. We had come to believe in this even before we deployed for OIF III, after hearing William constantly preach it. It was this belief that helped us stay the course during OIF III. We put out of our minds the idea that we were in Iraq to chalk up statistics: raids conducted, enemy killed or captured, and so forth. Our goal was to facilitate a tribal awakening against the violent jihadists. If we didn't fully accomplish this on that trip, then so be it. We would come back and try again, picking up where we left off.

## Getting into Their Decision Cycle

*Get into their decision cycles by finding places where you can make contact and engage, whether it's kinetic or not kinetic, then maneuver*

[Robert] questioned, why, after years of making no progress in Hit, coalition forces thought they should keep working with the same civic leaders.

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We put out of our minds the idea that we were in Iraq to chalk up statistics. Our goal was to facilitate a tribal awakening against the violent jihadists.

*from there. You don't know exactly where you are going to maneuver to, but you know towards what. Keep doing this to maintain forward motion and stay ahead of the enemy. Disrupt them. Don't develop such a grand plan that you constrain yourself. Free flow. Be like water. Maintain contact constantly and stay in their decision cycle. Make them react.*<sup>37</sup>

Robert already possessed his own version of William's vision. One can see it outlined in Robert's operational concepts, which we articulated when briefing our concept for the deployment. There were persons present at the briefing who thought we were being overly optimistic. But what they failed to understand was that we weren't being optimistic. Rather, based on our accumulated experiences on the ground we recognized what was possible in al Anbar. Ironically, our conviction—that the situation in Anbar was recoverable—put us in good stead with RCT 7's leaders when we met them for the first time. The RCT 7 chain of command was tired of hearing bad news and pessimistic assessments.<sup>38</sup>

Robert thus found himself spending countless hours with [Hasan] and with his father applying his mental jujitsu to shape their thoughts.

Very early on, Robert decided that William had initiated an appropriate course of action in bypassing Hit. Frustrated that coalition forces continued to engage the Hit city council and Sheikh Yassin, the local religious figure with known ties to the violent jihadist group Ansar al-Sunna, we decided to cut the Hit city council out of the picture by no longer empowering them.<sup>39</sup> We also decided that Hasan, Sheikh Kasam's cousin, should be mayor. He was not only close to us, but was intelligent, had the right political, business, and other connections, and also had the Nimr behind him. Hasan was not eager to fill this role, however. Robert thus found himself spending countless hours with him and with his father Anis, talking, listening, and applying his mental jujitsu to shape their thoughts. Over time, both Hasan and Anis came to accept that Hasan was the best choice for mayor. Over time, too, Robert developed a close enough personal relationship with Hasan that Hasan probably would have honored Robert's request no matter what.

Once we had selected a mayor, we then had to find a legitimate way to put him in position. Our worry wasn't that he would be rejected by the Iraqis, but that coalition forces would not accept his appointment. Over so many tours, no one bothered to question the legitimacy of those professing to be mayors or city council members and, in any event, it was virtually impossible to ascertain who had been what before the invasion. Yet, when we floated our idea of making Hasan mayor to coalition forces, they scoffed. What we next did exemplified how we operated throughout our deployment. When we met an obstacle, we went around it. If there was something that we could not directly effect, we effected it through the Iraqis.

When we met an obstacle, we went around it. If there was something that we could not directly effect, we effected it through the Iraqis.

We made Hasan mayor by convening a council of sheikhs who were friendly to us and by encouraging them to establish a new mayor and city council, one that we could work with. And they did. Twenty-seven sheikhs and *muktars* nominated Hasan to be mayor and signed a declaration confirming their decision. Coalition forces, particularly RCT 7 and 1-36, were slow to accept this change of representation, as we suspected they would be. However, after we persistently referred to Hasan as mayor at every opportunity and in every community engagement with coalition forces, and after pushing him to begin

coordinating with the provincial government in Ramadi, coalition forces accepted Hasan as mayor.

Zahid, a Nimr from the Shamal clan, had been hired as the district police chief during ODA 182's tenure. Zahid was to become a vital, yet problematic figure for us. Zahid hated the al Gaaouds. He claimed he hated them for their illicit relations with al Qaeda and other insurgents, but this was most likely exaggerated. We were told by older members of the tribe that the Shamal clan had once been a principal Nimr family, more important even than the Gaaouds, but that fortunes had changed and the Gaaouds supplanted them. Apparently this happened at least a century ago. But whatever the reason for Zahid's enmity toward the Gaaouds, it constituted both his greatest weakness and his greatest strength. His desire to undermine the Gaaouds, combined with his desire to avenge the death of his eldest son at the hands of AQI, gave him the necessary willpower and fortitude to be a proactive police chief. The intra-tribal rivalry this in turn spurred was difficult to manage at times, especially since Hasan was an al Gaaoud. It wasn't our design to have the two most powerful offices in Hit split between bickering clans, but we worked with what we had. Ironically, the overall situation ended up lending the ODA more leverage over both clans than it would have had otherwise.

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Current doctrine, as per FM 3-24, recommends that forces be used to secure an area, facilitating the "clear, hold, build" approach, and that deterrent patrols be utilized to keep the enemy off balance, disrupt enemy attempts to dislodge counterinsurgent forces, and reassure the population.<sup>40</sup> "Clear, hold, and build" and subsequent deterrent patrols were not options available to us. We did not own battlespace or forces. It did not seem likely that coalition forces would be able to conduct adequate "clear, hold, and build" operations in Hit given the lack of resources and troops available, coupled with established commitments to protect infrastructure, the IPs, and such. We instead guided our operations around these constraints, maintaining the model city approach.

To continue to build situational awareness and to begin pressuring insurgents who were hiding and operating in rural areas, we began conducting combat patrols with the 1A Scouts (formerly the DPs). Conventional forces often patrolled the roads, but we patrolled by dismounting, which enabled us to prowl around, talk with locals, and thoroughly investigate areas. Our patrols served several purposes. One was to initiate Robert's Gray Ghost concept. We consistently strove to project the image that we were good, decent people, although a bit mischievous; we were not scared of anything; and we wanted to underscore that we believed in people. We also sought to emphasize our solidarity with the DPs. We integrated them into our guntruck crews and all aspects of our patrols. The intent was to plant seeds in people's minds that would make them more amenable to us as we strove to shift the balance with the insurgents.

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Another calculated aspect of our patrols was to demonstrate strength. Our early patrols led to several direct-fire engagements and attempted IED strikes. The combined ODA/DP force aggressively counterattacked or pursued our attackers and, in each instance, the insurgents fled, often abandoning vehicles to escape across the Euphrates by boat or skiff. On these occasions, we

We wanted to establish a relationship with Sha'ban because he and his police embodied our Fort Apache concept.

conducted battlefield recovery, taking weapons and ammunition left behind, and giving them to the police. Cars and other materials we destroyed.

As these patrols continued, we also visited Colonel Sha'ban of the al Obeidi tribe, who was the police chief in Baghdadi. We wanted to establish a relationship with Sha'ban because he and his police embodied our Fort Apache concept, and because we hoped eventually to harmonize his efforts with ours in Hit. Colonel Sha'ban and his police did not control Baghdadi. They lived in a stronghold of their own making at a military housing complex that formerly served the al Asad Airbase under Saddam Hussein. Insurgents nevertheless feared Colonel Sha'ban's influence and targeted his police and their families for kidnapping or murder whenever they left the compound. Thus, it only made sense for us to address Sha'ban's immediate needs.

At the time, insurgent bandits were operating illegal checkpoints on Route Bronze between Hit and Baghdadi. The insurgents shook people down, stole goods and money, and also killed known coalition sympathizers—such as family members of Sha'ban's IPs. Coalition forces never could catch the insurgents at their checkpoints because the insurgents established effective early warning nets. They would depart the area as soon as coalition vehicles were reported coming down the highway. We told Sha'ban that we could do something about this. We also conducted a three-day medical civic action program for Sha'ban's community and ad hoc training for his IPs.

Sha'ban sent four of his most street-savvy IPs back to Hit to stay with us for a week. During this time ODA 545, Sha'ban's IPs, and the Desert Protectors conducted numerous combat patrols in civilian vehicles to penetrate the insurgents' early warning net. The IPs and DPs shot up several checkpoints this way. That stopped the insurgents for a period, but we had to be careful because we couldn't keep replicating our Trojan horse tactic.

Sha'ban's IPs were some of the most situationally aware Iraqis we worked with. We took them on several other patrols. On one night patrol, one of our vehicles broke down. While we were repairing it, two men rode up on motorcycles with their headlights off, unaware we were there. Sha'ban's IPs immediately identified them as insurgents on the Marines' target list. Sha'ban continued to help us throughout the tour.

Clearing operations have negative connotations in the COIN lexicon, but we found them useful when incorporated with our model city approach.

We likewise partnered with 1-36 and General Zahid to conduct larger clearing operations. Understandably, clearing operations have negative connotations in the COIN lexicon because they are associated with attrition-based strategies, but we found them useful when incorporated with our model city approach. Communities that both actively supported reinstatement of the IPs and suppressed violence were exempt. Clearing operations conducted at night, coupled with our daytime combat patrols, afforded the insurgents little rest. The effort that insurgents had to expend on early warning and continual relocation was effort that they could not devote to targeting coalition forces, ISF, or friendly populations. What we didn't do was what Robert called "Cop Rock." We didn't raid for the sake of amassing statistics of enemy killed or captured, and materials destroyed.



## Shaping

*It's about navigating people. Most guys forget that and ignore the human aspects that influence the plan. They try to concretely execute planning concepts regardless of what the will of the people involved is. You have to change their will or adjust to it.*

We treated each area and the people in it differently, yet consistently. We were always considerate, spoke Arabic, and were thorough without being culturally invasive, even when using coercive methods. We did everything in conjunction with local Iraqis. Robert stayed consistent throughout the entire tour. He adhered to a specific set of talking points and made sure the team abided by them as well. He always told people that the situation in al Anbar was going to get better. Robert's intent was to plant mental seeds so that once conditions did improve, continued improvement would become a self-fulfilling prophecy as people turned out to assist the coalition and ISF.

The only group Robert condemned was AQI. He did not condemn the resistance, but he did oppose its use of violence. In keeping with the idea of an Office of Bitches and Complaints, Robert publicized our willingness to talk with members of the resistance at any time to hear their grievances, as well as forgive anyone willing to denounce continued participation in insurgent activity, so long as they did so in the presence of their local sheikh or imam. Even if we couldn't prove it, we knew that many of the sheikhs and police we talked to were direct or indirect conduits to national resistance groups like the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade. Robert crafted the following talking points not only to sway third-party neutral segments toward our side but to engage the resistance:

- The situation will improve.
- AQI is out to destroy your way of life.
- More can be gained from political participation than violent contention.
- The insurgency against the Iraqi government is strengthening Iran's influence in Iraq.
- We are willing to sit down with any representatives of the resistance and hear them out.
- Acts of insurgent violence are criminal acts against the Iraqi people.

In time, several older tribal sheikhs and imams began to vent to us. They lamented the social wreckage that AQI was inflicting on traditional tribal society in Anbar. The older sheikhs voiced concern that they had lost control over the younger men in their tribes, especially the young 20-somethings and teenagers. Sheikh Anis, for instance, told us that AQI manipulated young men by framing insurgent life as romantic and heroic and saying jihad would give meaning to their young lives. Robert instantly saw what was happening. Young men, dismayed by the lack of opportunity in their lives and, at a more basic level, needing to feel like men, were drawn in by AQI's overtures. AQI was able to fulfill certain psychological and physical needs in ways the sheikhs could not, and thus was unraveling traditional social structures and replacing traditional figures of influence: sheikhs, imams, and parents. Robert recognized, however, that AQI was over-playing its hand, and this provided us with an opportunity. Robert used the sheikhs' frustration over the erosion of their authority to build solidarity with them, and we used AQI's own framing

Robert's intent was to plant mental seeds so that once conditions did improve, continued improvement would become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

“It came down to a discussion of the future as we saw it together. I got [the sheikhs] to troubleshoot solutions with me.”

devices to build internal support for the IPs with the sheikhs’ consent and partnership.

There was choreography to Robert’s deep discussions with tribal sheikhs and other local elites. Robert described this by using a tarot card analogy. He would lay out the general situation, then walk his audience through what would happen if nothing changed. After doing that, he would next lay out the second and third order effects and potential outcomes that would result from the positive actions and changes that could be undertaken by the person he was talking to. His approach combined war-gaming, counseling, listening, and honest dialogue. The dialogue always evolved into a two-way discussion of potential issues, complaints, and solutions. In describing his method, Robert said, “It came down to a discussion of the future as we saw it together. I got them to troubleshoot solutions with me.”

A significant turning point occurred for us around 10–12 October 2006.<sup>41</sup> We struggled to integrate the Nimr DPs into the local IA battalion as its scout platoon. Petty jealousies, the DPs’ unique relationship with the ODA, and the DPs’ own intransigence created animosity between the DPs and the IA battalion commander. The situation required our constant attention. The IA battalion commander, eager to demonstrate his authority over the DPs, instigated confrontations through unfair treatment of them. The DPs, in response, behaved flippantly and threatened to desert.

We heard the explosions [but] didn’t think anything of it until two wounded DPs came staggering into our compound.

At this time, the Marine MiTT responsible for advising the IA battalion held a battalion formation to rehearse a memorial service for Captain Secher, the MiTT member who was killed on 9 October. This formation was struck by three incoming mortar rounds, which killed five Iraqis, wounded 34, and wounded one of the Marine advisors.<sup>42</sup> We heard the explosions of the incoming rounds from our compound adjacent to the Iraqi camp. Being mortared at Camp Hit was a regular occurrence, and we didn’t think anything of it until two wounded DPs came staggering into our compound. ODA members immediately jumped in trucks and rushed to the impact site in the Iraqi camp to begin treating the wounded. The remaining ODA members went to 1–36’s battalion aid station where we knew the wounded would be triaged for medevac. Some of the wounded were screaming, and other DPs who were not wounded wandered around looking for their comrades. All of the members of ODA 545 could speak at least passable Arabic. We helped the battalion surgeon and medics by interpreting, by comforting some of the more seriously wounded, and by calming the unwounded.<sup>43</sup>

The attack happened just as night was falling. Of the 28 Nimr DPs in the scout platoon, two were killed and six wounded. Robert and I were quick to take control of the two dead Nimrs, so we could deliver them to their families for burial. Early the next morning, Robert, the ODA, and I escorted the bodies of the fallen Nimr to Tal Aswad, so that their families could bury them before sundown in keeping with Islamic tradition. The surviving Nimr DPs remained outraged by the attack. They were upset not over the losses per se, but over the useless nature of them. Even illiterate farmers and fishermen recognized the stupidity of holding a large troop formation in a camp that was regularly targeted by mortar and rocket fire.

We knew word about the casualties would spread quickly, which is one reason Robert and I decided to leave the bodies at the Tal Aswad police station and ask the police chief, Chief Ghanim, to contact the families and escort them to the station to receive their dead. Family and friends quickly descended on the police station, openly grieving and railing at coalition and Iraqi forces because of the senseless nature of the deaths. There was no point in our trying to allay their grief. We had brought the surviving DPs with us. We released them on leave and made ready to leave Tal Aswad.

The surviving Nimr DPs were upset not over the losses per se, but over the useless nature of them.

Before departing, we traveled to Sheikh Anis's to pay our respects and personally tell him what had happened before he heard a distorted version. We expressed our sympathies for the families and acknowledged that we understood their frustrations. Most important, we asked for his advice about how to handle the situation. Sheikh Anis, in a very grandfatherly manner, counseled us. Then, as we prepared to leave, he took me by the arm and whispered, "Do not worry. You will soon receive the help that you need."

One of our goals all along had been to form a Hit district SWAT using the DPs. We had repeatedly requested that RCT 7 work to get the DPs released from the Iraqi Army to serve as the foundation for SWAT. We cited the persistent poor treatment of the DPs by the IA battalion commander, explaining that he had alienated the DPs to the point that they would never be fully integrated into the predominantly Shi'a battalion. Our requests were continually denied. After the mortar attack, however, it was clear that the DPs would desert if something wasn't done. We then tried to get the DPs who did quit the army hired into the local IPs. Some went to work as security for the al Gaaouds.

As we prepared to leave, [Sheikh Anis] took me by the arm and whispered, "Do not worry. You will soon receive the help that you need."

In the weeks that followed the attack, we spent more and more time in non-kinetic engagement. Robert dedicated hours to listening to and talking with sheikhs, with General Zahid, and with others. We often invited General Zahid, Hasan, and members of their inner circle to stay the night at our teamhouse. The ODA members spent the evenings entertaining and conversing with our guests, always guided by Robert's talking points. Robert also developed specific talking points for ODA members when we wanted to influence our guests in a particular direction. Robert had the endurance for marathon talking sessions that far surpassed what anyone else on the team was capable of, and would talk long into the night with our guests, without the aid of an interpreter.<sup>44</sup>

Words nevertheless are meaningless without action. We thus sought to live General Mattis's dictum: "No worse enemy, no better friend." In terms of non-kinetic engagement with the sheikhs, with friendly populations, and with third-party neutrals, we, in Robert's words, "... slowly delivered on everything like a girl dating a guy, and wanting to ensure the relationship ends in marriage, not just a one-night stand—slowly." In other words, we did not promise or quickly deliver on large civil affairs contracts or other significant projects because we did not want to reduce our leverage.<sup>45</sup> But we also demonstrated that we would respond swiftly and decisively when engaged, and would just as quickly come to the defense of our Iraqi allies.

In time, both the Shamal and Gaaoud acted as gateways through which we expanded our tribal engagement. In some cases we reached out; in others

We heard about the Awakening in its early days, as it coalesced under the banner of *Sawar al Anbar*.

the tribes approached us. Sheikhs from Ramadi to Haditha began to request audiences with us, and Robert used these contacts to actualize his Waterloo concept—with the goal of facilitating cooperation among the tribes against AQI and, in the process, siphoning off the reconcilable segments of the resistance.

We heard about the Awakening in its early days, as it coalesced under the banner of *Sawar al Anbar* (SAA). We followed events in Ramadi through reporting but also learned much from our Iraqi friends. In late summer and early fall 2006, the coalition believed the Awakening was a localized event in Ramadi. We assumed otherwise after noticing indicators that General Zahid was connected to *Thawar al Anbar* (TAA), the militant action arm of the SAA, Sheikh Sattar's Awakening movement. Robert handled this development in much the same way he did when trying to reach out to the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade via certain sheikhs and other intermediaries. No Iraqi, save one contact, ever openly acknowledged that he had ties to the resistance. Conversations always tap-danced around the issue with insinuations like, "I know that you know that I know ..." Nonetheless, our prodding did result in an invitation to meet with Sattar at his compound in Ramadi, an invitation brought to us by Zahid.

Here is a bit more background about how our non-kinetic engagement bore this fruit: By December 2005 we had good rapport with several Nimr sheikhs from Barwanna, the Obeidi in Baghdad, the Albu Soda from Abu Tiban and Ramadi, the Mahal, the Albu Risha, and a smattering of other tribes. Sheikh Kasam hosted periodic councils at his compound in Zuwayyah where we effected both the OBC and Waterloo concepts. Leadership from RCT 7 (later RCT 2) and the MEF attended several councils. These meetings were especially important to us because we provided the sheikhs with talking points beforehand so that they could engage the Marine leadership in order to further our counterinsurgency concepts.<sup>46</sup> Several sheikhs, including Sattar on one occasion, asked us for advice in dealing with coalition forces. Robert and Chief Pitt skillfully used these opportunities, combined with assessments sent via our daily situation reports, to influence all sides toward common goals.

Robert believed that Bizea and other expatriate sheikhs were maneuvering to stay relevant.

For example, Sheikh Bizea was one of a number of older sheikhs who had sought refuge in Jordan after the invasion. He and his sons, Talal and Jalal, along with other expatriate sheikhs and businessmen, maintained an on-again, off-again dialogue with the coalition. Robert believed that Bizea and other expatriate sheikhs were maneuvering to stay relevant. Prior to the Awakening, this group maintained power and influence from across the border and profited from the war by playing all sides: the coalition, the resistance, and AQI. Coalition forces helped jeopardize this situation when the Coalition Provisional Authority rejected overtures from Bizea and his son Talal in 2004 to create tribal security forces.<sup>47</sup> The Awakening, which was an emergent grassroots movement, threatened to marginalize expatriate sheikhs like Bizea as the balance of power and influence started to shift to the sheikhs who had remained in Iraq, and who now began aligning with the coalition.

The complexity of all of these relationships was amazing. Sheikh Bizea provided long-distance counsel to Sheikh Kasam, who was a relative, but at the same time Bizea sent an envoy to court General Zahid, whose hatred of Kasam was no secret. Sheikh Sattar initially communicated with Zahid



through the SAA, but then established a direct link to Sheikh Kasam in accordance with tribal conventions, and assuaged Kasam's concerns about Zahid by promising to manage Zahid via SAA channels. The web of interactions and duplicity went on and on. What they signified was that even amidst the fight for survival against AQI, there was intense inter- and intra-tribal maneuvering, all aimed at control of resources, coalition support, contracts, IPs, etc.

Even amidst the fight for survival against AQI, there was intense inter- and intra-tribal maneuvering.

Unlike many other Americans who would have simply picked a side, Robert worked all of them equally. He recognized the value of acting as a central node among competing entities. For instance, an astute Army Civil Affairs major working for 545's AOB realized that his team could enjoin the Albu Sadi near Baghdadi to support coalition goals if their paramount sheikh, Sheikh Rad, so directed them. Unfortunately, Rad was incarcerated at Camp Bucca for allegedly participating in the killing of a Nimr man, although he most likely was the victim of an intra-tribal power play and had been set up. The AOB recommended his release, which the Marines also supported.

Unlike many other Americans who would have simply picked a side, Robert worked all of them equally.

Even though we were able to substantiate that the charges were very likely false, we still had to make sure that the Nimr would be okay with Rad's release. We also needed to make sure Sheikh Rad wouldn't become hostile due to the fact that he had spent approximately two years in confinement for a crime he didn't commit. To accomplish both, we decided to take control of Rad upon his release and sequester him for three days with tribal allies, who would follow a prearranged repatriation program designed to bring Rad up to date on the status of the Awakening and secure his—and hence his tribe's—support. We initially approached Sheikh Sattar with our repatriation idea, then told Sheikhs Anis and Kasam that we were going to work through Sattar to avoid conflict with the Nimr. Anis and Kasam responded by promising reconciliation between the tribes. They then requested the opportunity to repatriate Sheikh Rad themselves, which we happily agreed to.

As mentioned earlier, we were also training and advising the DPs as IA Scouts and still sought to create a SWAT. With our goal of creating a local, legitimate band of samurai to go after AQI, and with 1-36 wanting the IPs to have a direct action capability, the ODA and 1-36 collaborated to create a SWAT for the district IPs. This proved harder to execute than conceptualize. The phenomenal expansion of the Hit district IPs meant that 1-36 and the Marine PTT assigned to the IPs could not adequately equip the IPs they were already overseeing, let alone provide the necessary tactical gear to outfit the SWAT. Consequently, Robert and Chief Pitt solicited support from Hasan al Gaaoud and the Gaaoud family, who helped purchase and donate uniforms, plate carriers, AK-47 chest rigs, and other items.<sup>48</sup> In so doing, the clan publically signaled not only their support for local, legitimate security forces, but also their opposition to AQI.

Our goal of creating a local, legitimate band of samurai to go after AQI proved harder to execute than conceptualize.

We put our newly formed SWAT through a mini-selection and an intensive 30-day training regimen beginning in October 2006. By December, we had two SWAT platoons capable of conducting autonomous operations. On one of their first forays, the SWAT uncovered an impressive arms cache that included two SA-14 man-portable surface-to-air missiles. The SWAT routinely mobilized and conducted autonomous patrols or raids based on walk-in informants, such as capturing a Yemeni foreign fighter transiting the desert routes that lay between the Euphrates and Thar Thar Lake. Not to be outdone, the Tal

We knew that every time we spoke with certain individuals our message would be carried to nationalist resistance groups like Mohammed's Army.

Aswad IPs responded by mounting their own aggressive patrols. Led by Chief Ghanim, the Tal Aswad IPs captured several insurgents and foreign fighters along these routes and drove others off in running gunfights.

The SWAT's success inspired emulation and jealousy within the rank-and-file IPs. General Zahid, for instance, constantly tried to undermine the SWAT because we would not allow SWAT to become his dedicated praetorian guard. We conditioned the SWAT to serve the people and not cater to Zahid's nepotistic wishes. Unfortunately, this would later come back to bite us.

By December 2006, Robert had realized all of his concepts to some degree. The OBC existed, not formally but in concept, as we routinely held councils with sheikhs and other elites. The Hit SWAT were our samurai, and there was evidence that TAA was beginning to actively target AQI in the Hit area, which also fulfilled our samurai concept.<sup>49</sup> The Fort Apache model existed in the communities that aligned with us, including Barwanna, Baghdadi, Hai al Bekr, al Phurat, and Abu Tiban.<sup>50</sup> The Gray Ghost concept was manifest in these communities and in areas in between, while the Waterloo plan also was beginning to materialize. Several individuals who began to attend our councils in Zuwayyah I recognized as having previously been on our target list, and we knew that every time we spoke with certain individuals our message would be carried to nationalist resistance groups like Mohammed's Army, the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade, certain Ba'athist entities, and others.

We also saw signs that the fruits of Robert's endeavors were negatively affecting the enemy. AQI tried to disrupt our tribal alliances and target our tribal allies. For instance, Robert, Hasan, and I were targeted with an IED after leaving a Hit city council meeting; there was an attempted SVBIED strike on the Zuwayyah police station; a suicide bomber dressed in a burka attacked the IPs at the Hit bridge; and the IPs and their families were targeted for murder or kidnapping if they departed our base areas. Additionally, we had indications that we, along with the emergent Awakening movement, were swaying third-party neutrals. The Albu Soda and other tribes living in Abu Tiban established an unofficial tribal police force to protect their community, but respecting the legitimacy of the Hit district IPs, coordinated their actions with General Zahid. Perhaps most telling, tribal leaders from areas outside of Hit district came to us at various points to seek advice on how to achieve the same level of collaboration with coalition forces that we had in Hit district.

### Culmination

"We never built resentment, and we never made threats that we couldn't keep."

*We were transparent to the people: "Here is what we believe is good and bad. We believe in your way of life." We always made it clear that we worked with people; they did not work for us. We never built resentment, and we never made threats that we couldn't keep.*

Despite our progress among the tribes, Hit itself continued to be a cesspool of insurgent activity. The only Iraqi civilian medical facility in the area was the Hit hospital, which lay deep in one of the insurgent-controlled neighborhoods. Coalition forces routinely came under fire in that area. Pro-coalition civilians could not even contemplate going to the hospital. As a result, several people from the pro-coalition communities on the northeast side of the Euphrates died for want of medical care. This lack of access to good medical

care began to weigh heavily on the minds of some of the IPs. In response, we worked with a Civil Affairs team to initiate the building of a clinic in al Phurat. Although the clinic was not finished before our tour was completed, the psychological effect of responding to the immediate needs of our tribal allies was extremely positive.

We bypassed doing anything ourselves in Hit for reasons previously described, and because we did not want to be drawn into making Hit a battlefield, which is something that the insurgents sought. However, starting in November 2006, we began making routine excursions into the city at night with the SWAT. Sometimes we did so based on targeted intelligence. Most of our informants had made their final break with the insurgency and had come over to our side. Through them, we knew where the families of some of the hard-core insurgents lived. We treated these locations, along with their safe houses, like fishing holes, visiting them to put more pressure on the enemy. We also prowled around to prevent the emplacement of IEDs; we reported or cut the wires on IEDs that we found. On one occasion, the night before a planned 1–36 daylight operation, we discovered an IED factory with devices ready to go.

General Zahid also began sending nightly IP patrols through Hit. The purpose of these patrols, besides making it more difficult for the enemy to rest, was to boost the confidence of the IPs and enhance their sense that they had control over the situation, and over the enemy. All of this was critical preparation for an eventual showdown and the “reconquest” of Hit.

Robert envisioned an operation in which the IPs, supported by coalition forces, would sweep through Hit, drive out AQI, and reclaim permanent control of the city. He had planted the idea in Hasan’s and Zahid’s minds very early in our tour and routinely revisited the subject, sometimes subtly, other times more directly. Robert played upon Zahid’s narcissism, manipulating his desire to be a revered public figure, equal to the sheikhs in stature and respect. Hasan, because of his loyalty—or maybe his pragmatism, we will never truly know—was easier to work with.

The issue of when conditions would permit a successful reconquest was a topic of intense debate in the ODA. By November, we had developed sufficient contacts with access to the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade and even some other fringe elements that we thought we could ensure a successful operation. Without these contacts, the enemy owned the information, and without these contacts we wouldn’t be able to get the population in Hit to turn on additional spigots of information for us.

The first break came in November when Zahid asked us to secure the release of a man named Ma’mun, who worked for Zahid as an informant and had been detained by coalition forces. We obtained Ma’mun’s release, and when he subsequently had a falling out with Zahid, he began providing information directly to us. Ma’mun came from an established family in Hit and was a “former” member of the 1920th Revolutionary Brigade. The second break came when Ma’mun introduced us to an imam whom we called Abu Abdullah. Abu Abdullah had extensive knowledge of the insurgency between Hit and Baghdadi. He had operated a rural mosque where insurgents routinely met to plan, pray, or hide. He had abandoned his caretaking duties at

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Robert played upon Zahid’s narcissism, manipulating his desire to be a revered public figure, equal to the sheikhs.

the mosque because both coalition forces and the insurgents were after him. Each side suspected him of working for the other. He finally came to us. The Gaaouds provided Abu Abdullah with sanctuary, and he served as our go-between with Ma'mun. This led to an even deeper rift with Zahid, but it could not be helped.<sup>51</sup>

The last break came when Robert met with a man named Ibrahim Medani. Medani was an influential sheikh who resided in what is called the Teacher's District of Hit. Robert met Medani in December, while the ODA and SWAT were supporting a major 1-36 daylight operation along Cherry Street in Hit. We split the ODA into three cells, and each cell teamed up with a SWAT element to patrol into the city and cover the flanks of the main 1-36 effort. Since Robert was patrolling through Medani's neighborhood, he decided to drop in on him. As Robert remembered:

Sheikh Medani was always portrayed as a sickly old man by the 1-36 Cdr, but when I met him he was a vibrant, wise, and interestingly intelligent older gentleman. His tribal area was the Teacher's District, nearly a third of the town. It had a large number of personnel involved in JTJ [Jamaaat al-Tawhid Waal-Jihad, the predecessor to AQI], and that is why they had no problems conducting attacks on Iraqis down by the hospital. It was interesting that no big players resided in the area of town by the hospital, but all of the carnage occurred there. The main thing with Medani was that innocent people were getting hurt, and it was mainly the Americans doing the hurting after being shot [at]. He was the main venue for reconciliation prior to *Shurta Nasir*. Medani cooperated by keeping his word and pushing for a 1920th ceasefire; he leveled the playing field for us. He was all grins when I visited him later, during *Shurta Nasir*.

Medani told Robert that he had never met another American like him and wished they had met sooner.

Medani admitted that Robert impressed him by casually sitting with him and conversing in Arabic despite having an interpreter present. Medani told Robert that he had never met another American like him and wished they had met sooner. Up until this point, because we previously had only vague information about him, Medani hadn't really figured into our planning. Robert realized how influential Medani was at this impromptu meeting and took the time to pull him in and obtain his cooperation.

We finally agreed that by December 2006 conditions would be sufficient to retake the city, but the decision to do so was ultimately determined by forces beyond our control. 1-36 had suffered a long, hard tour in Hit, with many casualties. It had built a 700-man district police force and opened four additional police stations, expanding far beyond the al Phurat police force in Zuwayyah. 1-36's final major operation was to establish a permanent police station in Hit near Traffic Circle 2, in the vicinity of the market and astride Route Mavericks. We would have liked to convince 1-36 to reconquer Hit with us, but we could sense that 1-36's commander was unwilling. Given the circumstances of 1-36's tour and the unit's imminent redeployment, this was perfectly understandable. We began thinking about how to convince the incoming unit, 2-7 Infantry, to support our plan.<sup>52</sup>



Task Force 2-7 assumed control of the battlespace from 1-36 in January 2007. We decided to try the same indirect approach with them that had served us so well throughout our tour. Because of Sheikh Sattar's growing stature and the incipient Awakening, coalition forces were enamored with the idea of the Sunnis rising up against AQI. We took advantage of this fixation. We coached Hasan and Zahid to present a unified plan to the 2-7 commander for reclaiming Hit, but it took considerable time and effort to bring these two together to make a coordinated pitch.

Because of Sheikh Sattar's growing stature and the incipient Awakening, coalition forces were enamored with the idea of the Sunnis rising up against AQI.

Robert, Chief Pitt, and I sat with 2-7's commander, Ma'mun, Hasan, and Zahid in Zahid's office at the district IP station, while Hasan and Zahid presented "their" idea. Zahid, due to his extreme self-regard or maybe his unshakeable confidence, told the 2-7 commander that he could rid Hit of all "terrorists" in a two-day operation, but required coalition support for logistics and to cordon off the city. The 2-7 commander looked to us for confirmation of Zahid's ability to carry this out. We affirmed that he could, but suggested four days might be better. The resulting operation was named *Shurta Nasir* (Police Victory).

Two popular, abbreviated accounts of Operation Shurta Nasir are provided in Figures 8 and 9 on the following pages. One is the official MNC-I press release, and the other is taken from Wikipedia. These accounts, while never complete or entirely accurate, nonetheless provide a sense of the scale of support that coalition forces provided the IPs. In short order, 2-7 developed a plan to completely isolate Hit by cordoning it off, but 2-7's most impressive action by far lay in the realm of logistical support. 2-7 built and pre-staged logistical packages and assets so that as soon as the IPs had secured template locations for the establishment of additional IP stations, fortification and reinforcement of these sites could begin.

Aside from the significant logistical challenges, the most difficult part of the operation proved to be maintaining solidarity among the key Iraqi players. Unbeknownst to most observers, General Zahid almost derailed the entire operation. The day before the operation was to begin, Zahid decided to arrest Ma'mun for no valid reason but because Ma'mun had somewhat outshone Zahid during the planning for Operation Shurta Nasir. Ma'mun was our resident "insider" and provided crucial advice about how best to execute the operation without alienating Hit's citizens. But Ma'mun had also made the "mistake" of developing a closer relationship with Hasan than with Zahid.

Aside from the significant logistical challenges, the most difficult part of the operation proved to be maintaining solidarity among the key Iraqi players.

More than anything, Zahid wanted to be thought of as the conquering hero, and in his typical dramatic fashion threatened to not participate. The whole point of the operation was to support an Iraqi-led, Iraqi-executed plan with minimal numbers of Americans in the background, and with the ODA and the PTT advising the IPs. While it would have been possible to continue without Zahid, to do so would have undermined our efforts to reinforce and utilize the Iraqi chain of command. Robert worked hard to keep Zahid on board. He invited Zahid to stay at the teamhouse and then stayed up all night talking Zahid in circles until Zahid convinced himself to be the "better man" and set aside his differences with Hasan for the good of the community.

Task Force 2-7 began sealing off Hit on 15 February 2007. On the morning of 16 February, General Zahid, the IPs, IP SWAT, the ODA, and the PTT were

to commence the main effort. The operation was supposed to unfold in the following sequence: first, 2–7 would isolate the city, controlling all entry and exit points. Next, the SWAT would seize the main mosque in Hai al Bekr and the Green Mosque in Hit (located in the market 200 meters from the bridge). Zahid would then begin broadcasting instructions from both mosques. He

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Multi-National Force – West PAO

**Iraqi Police Conduct Operation Shurta Nasir to clear Hit of Insurgents**

**Hit, Iraq** – Nearly 500 Iraqi Police from Hit recently conducted Operation Shurta Nasir (Police Victory) meant to clear the town of terrorists and identify new locations for new police stations.

Iraqi Police planned and led this large scale operation, the first this year in western Iraq, which included nearly 100 recent graduates from the Jordanian International Police Training Academy. A combined force of 1,000 soldiers from 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division and U.S. Army soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Mechanized Infantry, also known as Task Force 2-7, cordoned off the area to assist the police during the operation.

Hit Police captured 13 known terrorists and one large weapons cache in raids and targeted searches through the city of roughly 100,000 inhabitants. It is believed that a number of terrorists went into hiding once the operation began. With the assistance of Police Transition Teams, the Iraqi Police also began construction of two new police stations to meet the demands of the growing department.

was to declare a 72-hour curfew, instruct all civilians to remain in their homes, and announce that any vehicles seen moving on the streets would be considered hostile.<sup>53</sup> After that, the SWAT would begin targeted raids in Hit and clear neighborhoods considered insurgent sanctuaries. Robert and an ODA cell would accompany the SWAT.<sup>54</sup> Robert was also going to use this opportunity to meet with key tribal and religious figures in the city, visiting them in their homes.

Chief Pitt led one ODA cell, with some SWAT and IPs, and patrolled into Hit to establish a forward command post near the city center. This provided direct over-watch along Cherry Street and Hit's southernmost neighborhood. Cherry Street had been Hit's most dangerous street and the southern neighborhood was an insurgent sanctuary. It was on Cherry Street and the approaches to this neighborhood that 1–36 had suffered the most catastrophic IED strikes. The plan

Figure 8: MNC-I Press Release of Operation Shurta Nasir<sup>55</sup>

was to put a police station midway along Cherry Street and another in the middle of the southern neighborhood.

As this was unfolding, I was supposed to take General Zahid and a large force of IPs to patrol the area between Hit and Mohammadi. This area consisted of palm groves, quarries, junkyards, and chicken farms that were commonly used by all manner of criminals and insurgents. We knew that, despite pained efforts to maintain operational security, the insurgents in Hit would have sensed “something” going on and fled to these areas.

Lastly, after the SWAT had cleared and secured the proposed IP station sites, Robert would call in the PTTs, who would arrive with IPs, logistical packages, and assets to begin building the IP stations. We gave ourselves four days to conclude the entire operation and begin restoring a controlled normalcy to the city.<sup>57</sup>

That was the plan.

Here is what happened: General Zahid was hours late marshaling his IPs, and then seemed to stall.<sup>58</sup> We suffered the delay as long as we could but finally launched the SWAT to seize the mosques and begin announcing the curfew. This inspired several aggressive younger officers who worked for Zahid. They rounded up IPs, manned IP pick-up trucks, and drove straight to all of the

insurgent-affiliated mosques in Hit. They cleared the mosques and began announcing the curfew. Robert, his cell, and the SWAT seized the building on Cherry Street that was to become the Cherry Street IP station and turned it over to the IPs. After that, Robert and his gang spent 96 hours clearing and raiding throughout the entire city, acting on information provided by Ma'mun and citizens who began to come forward.

Robert cleared the whole city without a shot being fired. It seemed evident that Medani had made good on his word, but we believed that Zahid also had something to do with the lack of insurgent resistance.

The 2-7 PTT commander (a young engineer captain and someone who excelled at working with Iraqis) and I, as patiently as we could, worked on assembling enough IPs to perform our tasks.<sup>59</sup> Zahid still stalled. It was apparent that he did not want to conduct his patrol outside of Hit. So instead, I redirected him to seize the IP station in the southern neighborhood, along with the hospital. I could have “played hardball” and forced Zahid to help us conduct the patrol between Hit and Mohammadi, but then I wouldn't have had confidence in him if we made contact with the enemy. It would have been me, two other members of 545, a Civil Affairs team, and a host of IPs whom we knew but had not trained. Zahid had handpicked many of these IPs for their loyalty to him.

Robert and I have since discussed these events at length, and we strongly believe that Zahid cut a deal that allowed him to take the city unopposed so that he could play the part of conquering hero, while the insurgents were allowed to avoid capture or death. This would explain why he was so cocksure about being able to clear the city in two days. Worth noting is that in a city that for months had been the nucleus of insurgent activity and violence—where 1-36 lost Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles to IEDs and foot patrols usually ended in firefights—we took the city without a single shot being fired. Then there were Zahid's stalling tactics, which prevented him from having to patrol insurgent havens south of town.

We didn't believe that Zahid's motives were nefarious so much as they were designed to protect his image. He had taken to carrying an ax handle and dispensing tough rhetoric, a caricature of Sheriff Buford Pusser as portrayed in the semi-biographic movie *Walking Tall*. Why risk spoiling his image by

Almost immediately following the transfer of authority, the local Iraqi leaders pressed the TF 2-7 IN for an operation to clear Hit due to the high level of insurgents believed to be in the city. LTC Crissman, the TF commander, agreed to a clearance operation and OPERATION SHURTA NASIR was created.

Operation Shurta Nasir (Police Victory) was TF 2-7IN's first Task Force level operation and set the stage for stability and security within AO Hit. The intent of the operation was to clear the city of AIF and assist the Iraqi Police (IP's) in establishing police stations within the city. Before the operation the Hit Police were over run while trying to establish new police station in the city. TF 2-7IN elements provided an outer cordon (with IA assistance), construction assets, and ground and air QRF support, while the IP's conducted clearing operations and occupied new police stations. The operation began on 15 February, 2007 with a support package consisting of sustainment, medical and construction assets being pushed forward to FB4, as well as a platoon-sized QRF element.

On 16 February, the TF TAC was moved to FB1 as a forward C2 element. Six blocking positions were occupied, preventing vehicle and pedestrian traffic into and out of the city, and a curfew was announced. RCT-2 Heavy Engineers, escorted by 2nd Plt E/2-7IN, began berming operations near the southern blocking positions to assist in enforcing the cordon. Once the cordon was set, IP's established TCP's within the city to enforce the curfew and began to occupy the two new IP stations in conjunction with the PTT.

Blocking positions were established by platoons led by 1LT Scott T. Freas and 1LT Eric Perkins and IP's began conducting clearing operations, beginning in the northwestern portion of Hit and moving toward the southern blocking positions, ultimately resulting in over twenty detainees and shifting the power in favor of the newly legitimized police force. At the conclusion of the four day operation, two new Iraqi Police stations were established; IP Station 2 in the middle of Hit was constructed by 2nd PLT E/2-7 IN, led by 1LT William C. Murray II and SSG Robert Puckett; IP Station 3 in the southern area of the city was constructed by the Task Force's Scout Platoon, led by 1LT Andrew Flemming and CPT Mark Cobos. Over 45 concrete barriers were emplaced at IP station 2 as well as over 1000 sandbags and more than a kilometer of razor wire. Police checkpoints were also established at the hospital and several key intersections, and the city was free of insurgents. The operation was finalized by a walk down the one time most dangerous street in Hit, “Cherry Street”, by LTC Crissman, the Hit IP chief GEN. Hamid, Mayor Hikar and an entourage of Hit citizens. Cherry Street runs through the center of the city and is the home of the Hit outdoor market.

Figure 9: Excerpt from Wikipedia on Operation Shurta Nasir<sup>56</sup>

Robert cleared the whole city without a shot being fired. [W]e believed that Zahid had something to do with the lack of insurgent resistance.

“If we stay and they go, we win.”

General David Petraeus visited several weeks after the operation and strolled down Cherry Street—something that was inconceivable just a month prior.

potentially getting his nose bloodied in a fight with insurgents? Besides, even Zahid understood that the tide in Anbar was turning, and that by letting the insurgents run away he could still win. Of course, it could also be that he was able to win without fighting because with his connections to TAA he constituted a credible threat in the insurgents’ eyes. Maybe he used *this* to his advantage to give the insurgents a way out, again because so long as they ran and he stayed, he won.

William had always said, “If we stay and they [insurgents] go, we win.” Robert and I repeated that again during planning to remind ourselves not to become too fixated on statistics.<sup>60</sup>

After Operation Shurta Nasir, the coalition and ISF controlled Hit. We had three IP stations in town, checkpoints at key locations, a permanent outpost at the hospital, and permanent checkpoints controlling the major roads into Hit. We left the minor roads permanently blocked. General David Petraeus visited several weeks after the operation and he, 2–7’s commander, Zahid, and Hasan strolled down Cherry Street—something that was inconceivable just a month prior. In a final bit of irony, Zahid and Hasan used an ODA tactic on General Petraeus. They were supposed to be present at the Cherry Street IP station awaiting him and the 2–7 commander, but on the one and only occasion Zahid and Hasan willingly worked together, they slipped out and went for a walk. They deliberately returned late, after General Petraeus’ arrival, so that he would have to stand to greet them.

## So What? Thoughts and Reflections

As I mentioned in the introduction, a lot of people have written about al Anbar and the Awakening. Some writers dissect the Awakening and the events there by taking an academic approach and applying concepts like social movement theory to better understand how the Awakening really happened. Others, through proximity to events and via interviews and research, have simply tried to capture the story because it seems so fantastic. Yet others have tried, and are trying still, to chronicle events so as to contribute to the popular narrative that the United States Marines and Army turned the tide through a culturally attuned counterinsurgency campaign.

Putting this article together gave me time to pause and reflect on my experiences and what I wrote, especially in light of the accumulated literature about al Anbar and the Awakening. It also prompted me to reach out to several individuals who lived the story with William and Robert, to see if their perspectives had changed over time.

Collectively, we agree: Successful COIN is the story of individuals—Dale Alford in al Qaim; Shaban in Baghdadi; William and Robert in Hit; Sean McFarland, Travis Patroquin, and Sheikh Sattar in Ramadi. At the same time, most of the written record is written clean, devoid of the inherently messy details. Anyone who has lived COIN knows, however, that counterinsurgency is never neat, never clean, and there is a lot of discovery and learning along the way, no matter how culturally attuned or well-read on counterinsurgency theory, local history, and so forth one may be.



A second conclusion my former teammates and I would offer, made clearer with the passage of time, has to do with the interrelatedness of events and the need to understand that everything is context-specific. The previous article in this issue of CTX, “Al-Sahawa: An Awakening in Al Qaim,” illustrates both sides of this observation. The Awakening movements in al Qaim, Baghdadi, Hit, and Ramadi were not independent events, and yet the ways the Awakening manifested itself in these locations differed a great deal. Regarding differences, the devil is in the details and nothing, absolutely nothing, takes place the same way in different places. Across al Anbar, for instance, the recruitment and development of the Desert Protectors and police was done very differently in al Qaim, Haditha, Hit, and Ramadi. Unfortunately, some opportunities were lost because leaders and staff expected efforts in other locations to move as well and as fast as they had in al Qaim.



Iraqi Police parade through Hit after Operation SHURTA NASIR

Our third conclusion is that most people look at the similarities between situations and do not spend enough time considering the differences. The corollary to this is that most people take note of successes and look at what went right versus what went wrong. For instance, how many books and articles, inspired by John Nagl’s *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*,<sup>61</sup> led people to try to poach successful methods from previous conflicts based on perceived similarities? How much institutional time and effort went into establishing lessons learned as *the* correct tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to apply, as if one can apply counterinsurgency solutions irrespective of local conditions? Or, how is it that so many people thought that the Anbar Awakening was replicable in Afghanistan simply based on the fact that the population in Afghanistan is also Muslim and tribal?

Our fourth conclusion is that we Americans didn’t win the COIN fight. Too many give us—Americans—way too much credit for pacifying Anbar, when, at the root of the Awakening, the Sunni of al Anbar changed their minds and changed sides. On reflection, a number of us on both William’s and Robert’s

Most people look at the similarities between situations and do not spend enough time considering the differences.

If population-centric COIN theories really worked, then there should be fewer problems in at least some parts of Afghanistan. Right?

The large collective “we”—  
Special Forces, Marines,  
the U.S. Army, and other  
Americans in al Anbar—were  
more lucky than good.

ODAs find that talking about the population as if it is the center of gravity, along with statements like “If you’ve secured the population, you’ve won the war,” are misguided. Population-centric COIN fundamentally assumes that the population already supports our side and that insurgents, corruption, and government incompetence are the only things standing in the way of our success. But, if population-centric COIN theories really worked, if the population was certain to side with us once we proved able to separate them from the insurgents and introduce competent government, then there should be fewer problems in at least some parts of Afghanistan. Right? After all, Alford, McMaster, MacFarland, Petraeus, and others who seemingly mastered counterinsurgency in Iraq also served in Afghanistan. They carried their lessons learned and TTPs to that theater. But, to what end?

Finally, looking back, my former teammates would say that the large collective “we”—Special Forces, Marines, the U.S. Army, and other Americans in al Anbar—were more lucky than good, and the sooner everyone realizes that, the better. Despite the fact that those who served with William and Robert knew something like the Awakening was possible from the earliest days of the war, despite our familiarity with the tribes, and despite our optimism even during the darkest days of the war, we still recognize that serendipity accounted for a lot. At the same time, the entire time we were there, we continually tried to think through the problem, and strove to create and shape opportunities in order to make the most out of whatever opportunities were handed to us.

Fortune favors not only the brave and the bold, but the prepared as well. Of course, there are times and places where the people are never going to come to your side and fortune is never going to give you a chance. But then, we would say, you have to be smart enough and sufficiently humble to recognize when that is the case, too. ❖

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MAJ Brent Lindeman** is a company commander with U.S. Army 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne).

#### NOTES

- 1 Brent Lindeman, “Better Lucky than Good: A Theory of Unconventional Minds and the Power of ‘Who’” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009), [http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2009/Dec/09Dec\\_Lindeman.pdf](http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2009/Dec/09Dec_Lindeman.pdf)
- 2 William is a pseudonym. All quotes in this section, “William’s War,” are his, unless otherwise cited, and come from an interview conducted by the author in Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, 5 July 2009. The names of the Iraqis described in the article were also changed to protect their anonymity.
- 3 Power is defined here as the ability to *compel* people to follow, and prestige as the ability to *impel* people to follow.
- 4 General Mattis was the 1st Marine Division Commander and responsible for operations in Anbar under the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force commanded by Lieutenant General Conway. William’s company headquarters, led by MAJ

Adam Such (the AOB), worked closely with General Mattis and his staff. Iraqis have local names for small geographic areas that often encompass several towns or villages. Al Phurat was one such area. It consisted of the villages of Jubayl, Zuwayyah, Tal Aswad, and the areas between.

- 5 *Wasta*: an Arabic word whose meaning is an amalgamation of the terms *influence*, *clout*, and *prestige*.
- 6 William and members of ODA 555 spoke with Sheikh Reshad’s nephew who was in attendance at the city council meeting. His version of events matched the story related to William by the Marines.
- 7 S2: An intelligence officer and the corresponding intelligence section of a commander’s staff.
- 8 Grant T. Hammond, *The Mind of War: John Boyd and American Security* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 147.

- 9 The term *Battlefield Operating Systems* has been formally replaced by the term *Elements of Combat Power*, of which there are eight: leadership, information, movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, command and control, and protection. Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-0: Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, February 2008).
- 10 Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Field Manual 101-5-1: Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1997), 1-31.
- 11 Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 50, 3rd quarter (2008): 64-5.
- 12 *Big men* is a term borrowed from anthropology to describe leaders who rely on prestige rather than power to lead.
- 13 The Burgess family resided in Jubayl, a town that lay in al Phurat and our AO.
- 14 Carter Malkasian, "Evidence from al Anbar," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 46, 3rd Quarter (2007): 123.
- 15 Night letters are death threats, so called because they are found in the morning after having been left or tacked up on someone's door, or often the door of the local mosque, during the night.
- 16 Firm base: the Marine term for a permanent company-sized operating base.
- 17 *Jazeera* was the local name, in Arabic, given to the desert area lying between Thar Thar Lake and the Euphrates River.
- 18 Malkasian, "Evidence from al Anbar," 123.
- 19 2-114, which was subordinated to RCT 2, was responsible for the AO that included Hit at that time. The Hit area of operations was a revolving door for coalition units. Between August 2005 and January 2006, there were five units responsible for the Hit AO: 3-25 Marines, 3-6 Marines, 2-114 FA, 13th MEU, and 22nd MEU.
- 20 Michael R. Gordon, "Wary Iraqis are Recruited as Policemen," *The New York Times*, 24 July 2006. Although I did not personally interview anyone who had witnessed the incident firsthand, I heard the story in various places during a tour in 2005 along the Euphrates River Valley between Ramadi and Haditha. All these accounts were essentially identical. Gordon reports that the policemen were shot. In every account that I heard of the incident, it was said that at least some of the policemen were beheaded.
- 21 The Nimr tribesmen were from isolated villages along the Euphrates between Hit and Ramadi. The safest and most expedient option was to consolidate them in the desert near the al Gaaoud family compound in the town of Zuwayyah.
- 22 ODA 545 believed that the quarter-mile stretch of road leading from the eastern side of the bridge to the main road that paralleled the Euphrates was seeded with IEDs. The 13th MEU, based on the ODA's recommendation, cleared this section of road using a rocket projected explosive line charge called a Mine Clearing Line Charge (MICLIC). The MICLIC charges set off 16 secondary explosions from IEDs, which destroyed much of the road and adjoining sections of palm grove. The damage was unavoidable, given that the MCLIC was the safest way to clear a road on which insurgents had had three uninterrupted months to prepare an IED belt for the day coalition forces did start to repair the Hit Bridge.
- 23 The 22nd MEU replaced the 13th MEU.
- 24 Sadly, the Desert Protector program was prematurely terminated, and we had little to offer them.
- 25 Dick Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy Seals and the Winning of al-Anbar* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 71.
- 26 Both the Nimr Provisional Company and the Desert Protectors succeeded because they filled a primal need common to men all over the world. The units gave their members a positive sense of self-worth and something to be proud of.
- 27 Robert is a pseudonym. All quotes contained in this chapter are his unless specifically cited otherwise, and come from an interview conducted by the author in Clarksville, Tennessee, 20 August 2009, with a follow-up interview conducted via email on 3 November 2009.
- 28 CENTCOM: Central Command, the geographic U.S. combatant command with responsibility for the Middle East and Southwest Asia.
- 29 ODA 182 relieved us at the conclusion of our OIF III deployment. TF 1-36 was 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division. TF 1-36 replaced 22nd MEU in February 2005; RCT 7, having replaced RCT 2, was TF 1-36's operational headquarters.
- 30 This was uncoordinated, a natural result of ODA 545's efforts to get the Zuwayyah IPs sanctioned before rotating back to the United States at the end of its OIF III tour.
- 31 Dan Ephron and Christian Caryl, "A Centurion's Emails," *Newsweek*, 6 November 2006: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-153583586.html>
- 32 John Mosby was a U.S. Confederate cavalry officer who commanded the 43rd Battalion, 1st Virginia Cavalry, known as Mosby's Raiders, in the American Civil War (1861-65).
- 33 Fort Apache, in what is now the U.S. state of Arizona, was established in the 1870s as a U.S. Army outpost in the heart of the Apache Indian homeland. Its purpose was to bring the Apache people, who resisted encroachment by white settlers, under control.
- 34 Robert admitted Waterloo is not a perfect analogy, but the intended correlation was that if we could use amnesty and reconciliation to bring insurgents to our side, it would put an end to AQI, just as the Battle of Waterloo (18 June 1815) put an end to Napoleon's reign.
- 35 "Hit, Iraq," *Absoluteastronomy.com*; [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Hit\\_Iraq](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Hit_Iraq)
- 36 Sheikh Yassin wasn't a tribal sheikh, but a religious leader residing in Hit. We considered Sheikh Yassin to be irreconcilable. We likewise considered Salafist jihadist groups such as Ansar al-Sunna to be irreconcilable.
- 37 This quote and all the subsequent italicized quotes that begin subsections are Robert's words.
- 38 RCT 7, commanded by Colonel Blake Crowe, was responsible for al Anbar north and west of Ramadi when we returned for OIF IV.
- 39 Ansar al-Sunna, a Salafist group, was on our list of irreconcilables.
- 40 Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1997), A-5.
- 41 The dates are approximate. It occurred a day to a few days after Captain Secher was killed.
- 42 Robert remembers evacuating 53 people; 34 of the wounded required extended hospitalization for their wounds and were not returned to duty after treatment.

- 43 We had developed a list of 600 key Arabic words that every detachment member had to learn. We conducted all of our FID training without using interpreters, were able to intermix Iraqis into our truck crews, and conducted combat operations without interpreters if they were not available. We did this deliberately, because once a unit became reliant on interpreters, the host nation forces would turn to the interpreter for guidance because he was the communicator. We always wanted the Iraqis to turn to us first in any situation; thus we implemented intensive language training on our ODA.
- 44 We frequently had to invite Zahid to stay. Because of his initial willingness to fight AQI and because of his stature among the Shamal, who comprised the bulk of the police, Zahid was an important figure. However, his erratic behavior, narcissism, and contempt for the Gaaouds required continual management so that he didn't instigate intra-tribal conflict or make irresponsible decisions regarding the IPs just to serve his personal purposes.
- 45 This worked well for us until we were undercut by RCT 2's Civil Affairs element, which offered large civil-affairs contracts to Sheikh Kasam, mostly as a method to buy cooperation. We, in contrast, built relationships, then very carefully used projects as subtle leverage in an escalating game of quid pro quo, just as William had done in OIF II. We also used dentcaps (dental civic action programs), humanitarian assistance, and medical assistance as tools for building our relationships with the tribes.
- 46 In several instances, when we wanted to influence coalition forces in certain directions, we translated talking points into Arabic and had the sheikhs rehearse.
- 47 Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe* (New York: Random House, 2008), 24.
- 48 The items were purchased through business associates in Baghdad.
- 49 As noted, the Tal Aswad and Baghdadi IPs became more aggressive as well.
- 50 We did not work in Barwanna; the Marines and our sister ODA (ODA 542) did. The Barwanna Nimr sheikhs first approached us, seeking to establish a relationship and emulate the coalition-tribal collaboration in our AO. We met with them routinely at our councils but handed them off to ODA 542 to work with directly.
- 51 Reflecting back on Sheikh Anis's statement, "You will soon receive the help that you need," it appeared to Robert and me that the Nimr, and also the Gaaouds, were facilitating the personal connections that later made our culminating operation, *Shurta Nasir*, possible.
- 52 2-7 Infantry: 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.
- 53 Zahid took seriously the threat of SVBIEDs; he also concurred with us that previous sniper attacks had most likely been executed from a car.
- 54 ODA 545 was trained to operate in independent three-man cells depending on mission requirements.
- 55 Multi-National Corps-Iraq, press release, "Iraqi Police Conduct Operation Shurta Nasir to clear Hit of Insurgents," 22 February 2007: [http://www.blackanthem.com/News/Allies\\_20/Iraqi\\_Police\\_Conduct\\_Operation\\_Shurta\\_Nasir\\_to\\_clear\\_Hit\\_of\\_Insurgents4580.shtml](http://www.blackanthem.com/News/Allies_20/Iraqi_Police_Conduct_Operation_Shurta_Nasir_to_clear_Hit_of_Insurgents4580.shtml)
- 56 "Hit During the War," *Wikipedia*: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%I4%SBt\\_during\\_the\\_Iraq\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%I4%SBt_during_the_Iraq_War). See the comment in paragraph two where the contributor states, "Before the operation the Hit Police were overrun while trying to establish new [sic] police station in the city"—neither I nor any of the persons I interviewed know what this comment refers to. Insurgents did conduct a coordinated attack on the IP station at Traffic Circle 2 shortly after it was established, but the attack was beaten back. There were no other sustained attempts to attack that IP station during ODA 545's OIF IV tour.
- 57 Another challenging aspect of the operation was to keep the IPs working for four straight days. Something so simple actually caused great consternation among many of the IPs. There were no such issues with the SWAT.
- 58 The IPs were predominantly Nimr, and all came from the Tal Aswad, Zuwayyah, Hai al Bekr, and Hit stations. The Kubaysa IPs did not want to participate and, at any rate, were less capable and certainly less reliable. The PTT and Zahid had carefully worked out how many IPs would be left behind to man the IP stations in Tal Aswad, Zuwayyah, and Hai al Bekr and patrol their jurisdictions.
- 59 There were two PTTs, one of Marines from CPATT, and the other consisting of Soldiers from 2-7, led by this young captain.
- 60 The personnel of RCT 2, which had replaced RCT 7, were openly disappointed with how few detainees came from the operation. They were further frustrated that several detainees, whom informants identified as known insurgents, could not be processed for lack of evidence. On a separate note, "we stay, they run," must be reinforced with an aggressive IO campaign. The public has to understand what had to happen so victory could be complete.
- 61 John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).



## Maoist Insurgency in India: Emerging Vulnerabilities

THE MAOIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA STARTED IN THE LATE 1950S AS A PEASANT uprising in the wake of an independence struggle in Naxalbari, a small village on the Indo-Nepal border, hence the name *Naxalism*. The Naxalites were a group of far-left radical communists who promoted Maoist political sentiment and ideology to fight exploitation by landlords in India's feudal postcolonial socioeconomic system. The Naxal movement was quashed by force, only to resurface as a Maoist insurgency with the broader objective of ushering in a democratic revolution directed against imperialism, feudalism, and collusive bureaucratic capitalism. From its beginnings as a peasant revolt in the mid-1970s in the state of West Bengal, within a span of two decades Maoism quickly spread across many states. At present, nearly 15 states are affected to varying degrees. The movement finds broad appeal among people suffering the ills of under-development, due to the fact that a people's democratic revolution designed to fight exploitation remains the selling point of Maoist ideology. Modern Maoism, patterned on Mao Zedong's successful peasant revolt in post-World War II China, believes that political change must come through armed agrarian revolution (i.e., a protracted "people's war") with the forcible seizure of power as its central and principal task. Peasant armies, according to this vision, will encircle cities from the countryside and thereby finally capture them. Hence, the countryside remains the center of gravity for the movement.

In the last two decades, most state governments have failed to understand the nuances of combating this Maoist type of insurgency and therefore have attempted piecemeal solutions that have brought partial and temporary results. Despite their success at quelling the secessionist movement in Punjab in the 1980s, officials have surprisingly developed practically no new strategic innovations for dealing with the Maoist insurgency in India. Government-sponsored developmental policies and schemes have barely penetrated the disenchanted populations in the tribal belts of nearly 15 states.<sup>1</sup> The progress made by security agencies up to 2011 has hardly been encouraging either, and the Maoist area of influence, called the "Red Corridor," is expanding into the northeastern states of India.<sup>2</sup> This may be attributed to poorly organized security forces and governmental mechanisms that are ill-equipped to execute development programs and projects. In contrast, the Maoists have held sway over these rural areas because they are better organized and focused, and because they deliver instant results to the disenchanted population.

Recent developments, however, seem to indicate fissures that may lead to critical vulnerabilities within the Maoist uprising. These include a growing aversion to continued violence among the rural population and the morphing of the Maoist organization into a centralized, hierarchical structure that is increasingly becoming susceptible to caste, class, and gender biases among the cadres.

*Gp Capt Srinivas Ganapathiraju,  
IAF*

Modern Maoism believes that political change must come through armed agrarian revolution with the forcible seizure of power as its central and principal task.

Government-sponsored developmental schemes have barely penetrated the disenchanted populations in the tribal belts.

An analysis of certain recent developments seems to throw light on emerging vulnerabilities that could well spell the movement's doom.

An insurgency's influence over the local population and reliance on an organizational structure that is tuned to networked guerilla tactics are its critical strengths. The dilution of popular support and an ill-suited organizational structure could, by the same token, prove to be an insurgency's critical vulnerabilities. India's Maoists are no different, and an analysis of certain recent developments seems to throw light on emerging vulnerabilities that could well spell the movement's doom.

Between 2004 and 2006, three major outfits—the Maoist Communist Centre, the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist), and the People's War

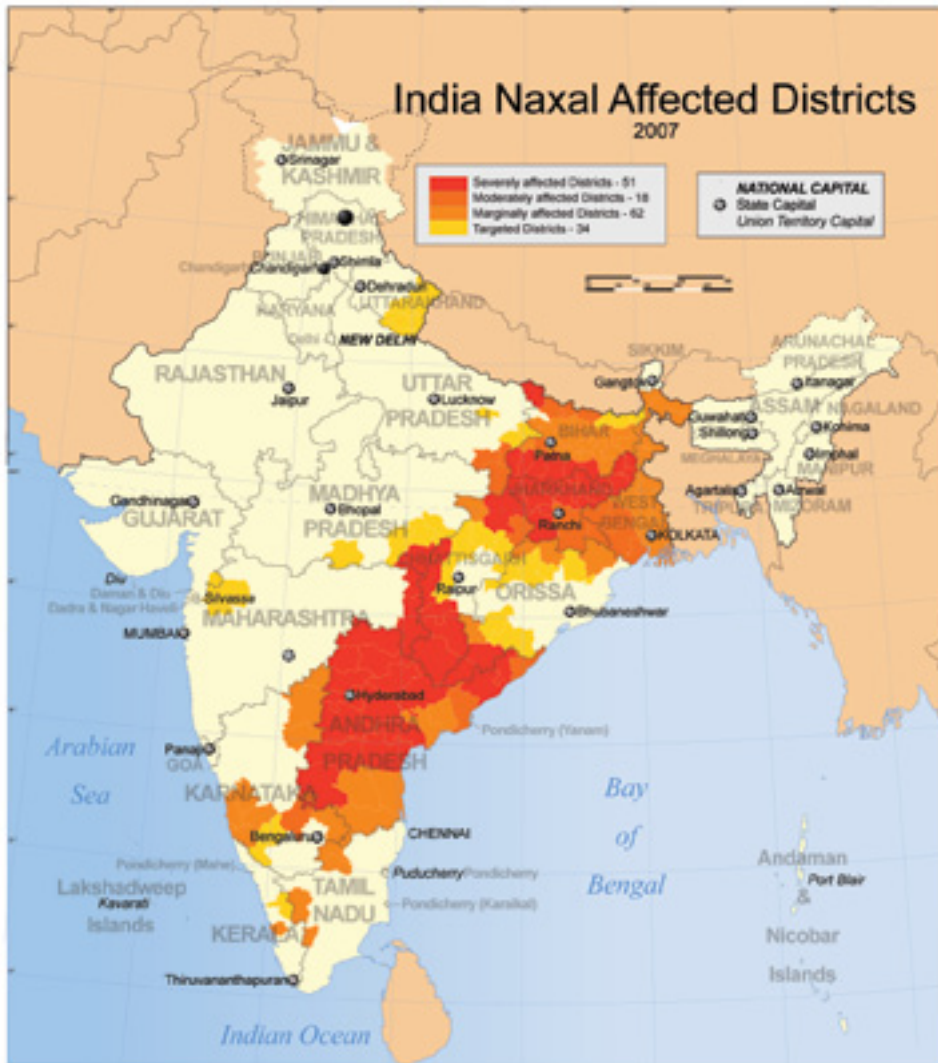
Group—merged into a single group calling itself the Communist Party of India (Maoist), or CPI (M). Although it remains an insurgent organization with no political representation, since 2006 CPI (M) has consolidated as a centralized, hierarchical pan-Indian entity that is active in 15 Indian states and has its tentacles in the entire Red Corridor.<sup>3</sup> This is apparent from the scale of coordinated attacks carried out since 2008.<sup>4</sup> While one might argue that these attacks are an indication of the group's growing strength, the counter-view is that a centralized, hierarchical structure has never suited the kinds of operations undertaken by insurgents. The question then arises: Does this present an opportunity for the state to capitalize on a critical vulnerability of the Maoists? The answer is “yes.” Being less responsive and less adaptable to changes in the environment, a centralized hierarchical outlaw organization may not be very resilient under pressure and faces the long-term risk of extinction.<sup>5</sup>

The major cause of the downfall of the Naxalbari movement, a forerunner to the Maoist insurgency, was the emergence of feuds among its leaders at the highest level in the organization.<sup>6</sup> The

split among the leadership was related to authority and how it percolated to the lower levels in the organizational structure. In other words, the split was over the choice of organizational structure: either a centralized hierarchy or a decentralized network. The major part of the Naxalbari movement morphed into a centralized organization and was weakened by the resulting ideological confusion among the cadres.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, the now-centralized CPI (M) has also seen fissures emerging within its cadres based on caste, gender, and religious biases. For example, in 2008 Maoists killed Swami Laxmananda Saraswati, a Hindu leader in the

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State of Orissa, and his four associates. This incident triggered communal riots in certain districts and caused a split in CPI (M) along religious lines, from which a new group of Hindu Maoists emerged.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it has been well established that *dalits* (the weaker class in the caste system) and women are not adequately represented in the higher echelons of the Maoist organization, despite their being the main driving force for revolution at the grassroots level.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the growth of Maoism in the state of Bihar is primarily attributed to the ability of the Maoists to exploit the caste-based divisions in Bihari society.<sup>10</sup>

One of the Maoists' strengths has been a narrative that is based on an ideology separate from caste, gender, and religious biases.<sup>11</sup> The Maoists have so far called for a people's war against class biases, without distinguishing among the other existing segregations in Indian society. Because being downtrodden was the singular binding force, Maoist ideology found automatic appeal among almost all sections of Indian society, with very little coaxing or effort needed from the Maoist leadership to fill the cadres. The above-mentioned incidents, however, seem to indicate that the appeal of the Maoist narrative is waning with local leaders who are trying to mobilize on the basis of existing caste and religious divisions in the society.<sup>12</sup> There is thus an opportunity for the state to "drive the wedge" and apply counter-propaganda to weaken the Maoist organization and dilute its popular support.

Organized vigilantism, despite being undemocratic and tricky to control, was backed by the state in an attempt to show quick results at the local level.

A key factor in maintaining the relevance of an insurgency amidst a population is the management of violence.<sup>13</sup> Popular support for the insurgents' cause will be lost when the population is subjected to acts of extreme violence perpetrated directly by the insurgents, or when people are caught in the cross-fire between insurgency and counterinsurgency. In the state of Chhattisgarh, for example, a recent development has been the formation of "Salwa Judum," an anti-Maoist outfit made up of victims of Maoist high-handedness. Salwa Judum, under state sponsorship, has been resorting to violence against Maoists with a fair degree of impunity. This is forcing the Maoists to respond with more violence. The second-order effect of this development is that innocent people are being caught in the crossfire and are increasingly critical of the continual violence.<sup>14</sup> This organized vigilantism, despite being undemocratic and tricky to control, was backed by the state under pressure from higher echelons in an attempt to show quick results at the local level. Meanwhile, recognizing the fact that the state was promoting extrajudicial violence as a way to manipulate the population, India's highest-level judiciary ruled against it. The undemocratic ways of the state government attracted adverse comments, and Salwa Judum was dismantled, albeit after its effects were already being felt. Notwithstanding the poor choice of strategies, the aftereffect of deploying Salwa Judum gives the state an opportunity to present alternatives to the people of Chhattisgarh based on economic and social development, in contrast to violence.

The kinds of opportunities available to the state, as discussed above, call for a paradigm shift in the strategy to counter the Maoist menace. Following are some key aspects of this shift:

1. Avoid large-scale kinetic actions against lower-cadre Maoist operatives and instead target the higher leadership in the centralized hierarchy. Well-trained Army Special Forces could be used to conduct these

Maoist ideology has lost its relevance and is unlikely to survive in a vibrant democracy like India in the long run.

The insurgency's vulnerabilities present that much-needed breakthrough opportunity for the final push to action.

surgical, small-footprint strikes. Cease any overt state support to violent vigilante outfits like Salwa Judum. Meanwhile, lower-cadre operatives must be lured into surrendering their weapons and cooperating through state-sponsored schemes like Bihar's "Shikaria Model."<sup>15</sup>

2. Embark on a large-scale, mass media-driven propaganda campaign that highlights the caste, class, gender, and religious biases of the Maoists to tarnish their narrative and create feuds within the organization.<sup>16</sup> These rifts can also be exploited for intelligence gathering and infiltration into the organization.
3. Drawing on the experience of the British in Malaya, create manageable pockets of secure zones in the Red Corridor to receive focused development aid. These pockets can then be projected as models and expanded outwards in an incremental and iterative manner. The strategy of "clear, hold, and develop" has been adopted in spurts in the past by many state governments, but never as a sustained effort.
4. Because the Red Corridor spans 15 states, achieving coherence in plans and efficiency in resource management requires a centralized approach from the Indian government. Individual state governments, if left to themselves, are likely to be driven by local politics and to treat the Maoist menace as a local law and order problem.
5. Considering that CPI (M) projects itself as the central organization for the insurgency, attempts need to be made to bring its leadership into mainstream politics.

Maoist ideology has lost its relevance internationally, even in China, and is unlikely to survive in a vibrant democracy like India in the long run.<sup>17</sup> Large-scale media activism, greater penetration of mass media, and increasing levels of awareness and education are helping to deepen democratic norms in the country and are influencing political will. In the case of the Maoists, New Delhi's political will to act is on the cusp of being swayed towards a multi-pronged campaign. Under these circumstances, the insurgency's vulnerabilities discussed above present that much-needed breakthrough opportunity for the final push to action. This vital political will is nevertheless unlikely to reach decisive proportions due to the following constraints:

1. Vote-bank politics are likely to prevent state governments from letting the central government handle the issue. After all, the Maoist insurgency is still considered a law and order problem, which unfortunately is under state jurisdiction.
2. Even the central government is reluctant to deploy SOF (military or paramilitary) from fear of a political backlash due to likely civilian casualties.
3. In a society where caste continues to play a major role in binding groups of people together, action against a particular group of Maoists can easily be distorted by the opposition in the parliament to insinuate government bias and drive away popular support. Such possibilities are major impediments to bolstering political will and decision-making, especially when coalition governments are the order of the day.
4. Large-scale official corruption and collusive bureaucratic capitalism are the major impediments to the implementation of the Malaya model.



Notwithstanding the above issues, in India a trigger event like the Mumbai terrorist attack of 26 November 2008 can easily kick off the kind of public outcry needed to focus political will and force the decision-making that are key to countering the Maoist insurgency in the long run. Another disaster may be what it takes for the Indian government to finally do something about the chronic insurgent violence in the Indian countryside. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## NOTES

- 1 Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajat Kumar Kujur, *Maoism in India: Reincarnation of Ultra-Left Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 4.
- 2 Ajai Sahni, "The Maoists: Dance of the Tarantula," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, 5 March 2012: [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10\\_35.htm#assessment1](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_35.htm#assessment1)
- 3 Chakrabarty and Kujur, *Maoism in India*, 195.
- 4 A few examples: On 29 June 2008, Maoists attacked a boat on Balimela reservoir in Orissa that carried four anti-Maoist police officials and 60 Greyhound commandos, killing 38 troops. On 16 July 2008, 21 policemen died when a police van was blown up in a landmine blast in the Malkangiri district of Orissa. On 13 April 2009, 10 paramilitary troops were killed when Maoists attacked a bauxite mine in the Koraput district of eastern Orissa. On 15 February 2010, in Silda, in the West Midnapore district of West Bengal, 24 personnel of the Eastern Frontier Rifles died when Maoists attacked their camp. On 4 April 2010, Maoists triggered a landmine blast in the Koraput district of Orissa that killed 11 security personnel of the elite anti-Naxal Special Operations Group. The list goes on. For more, see the *Times of India* archive: [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-05-17/india/28309767\\_1\\_maoists-ambush-bastar-saranda](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-05-17/india/28309767_1_maoists-ambush-bastar-saranda)
- 5 David Tucker, "Terrorism, Networks, and Strategy: Why the Conventional Wisdom is Wrong," *Homeland Security Affairs* 4, no. 2 (June 2008): 6: <http://www.hsaj.org/?fullarticle=4.2.5>
- 6 The major contributor to the failure of the Naxalite movement in the late 1960s was its overall organizational weakness. It was a highly centralized organization (with decentralized operations) under Charu Mazumdar's charismatic leadership. Ideological differences and powerful egos led to the splintering and the final demise of the movement in the early 1970s. For more, see Chakrabarty and Kujur, *Maoism in India*, 58; and Keith J. Harnetiaux, "The Resurgence of Naxalism: How Great a Threat to India?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, June 2008), 34: <http://calhoun.nps.edu/public/handle/10945/4132>
- 7 Chakrabarty and Kujur, *Maoism in India*, 59.
- 8 Ibid., 13.
- 9 Ibid., 197.
- 10 Ibid., 169.
- 11 Gordon H. McCormick, "People's War," in *Encyclopedia of Conflicts since World War II*, ed. James Ciment (Armonk, New York: Sharpe Reference, 1999), 23–24.
- 12 The Maoists have suffered tremendously as a result of their strategic overreach by extending their "people's war" into areas where conditions are far from favorable. The regionally oriented objectives of the people are failing to align with the larger national-level objectives of the Maoists. For more on this, see Sahni, "The Maoists: Dance of the Tarantula."
- 13 The organization for a people's war means building a grassroots, village-based alternative to the state. The chief measure of performance is not the scope or intensity of one's military actions, but the scope, depth, and vitality of the organizational forms. For more, see McCormick, "People's War."
- 14 Chakrabarty and Kujur, *Maoism in India*, 196.
- 15 In Shikaria village in Jehanabad (Bihar), a region that witnessed large-scale Naxal violence in the 1970s and 1980s, a revolutionary movement for change was launched. The Nitish Kumar government, instead of using repressive mechanisms to curb the movement, handed over development funds to the local Maoists and their supporters. They were directed to identify the area's priorities and undertake the needed development projects themselves. The Naxalites, who used to collect protection levies from local bigwigs, were now getting funds directly from the government, and their close relatives became contractors. During the last seven years, the region has not witnessed any Naxalite action.
- 16 As this article was being written, the government of India roped in All India Radio (AIR) to air specially produced audio clips in different local dialects, with themes that counter Maoist propaganda. For more, see Vishwa Mohan, "Government Goes AIR-Borne, Uses Radio Jingles to Take on Maoists," *The Times of India*, 26 October 2012: [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-10-26/india/34748788\\_1\\_jingles-maoists-naxal-heartland](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-10-26/india/34748788_1_jingles-maoists-naxal-heartland)
- 17 In a media interview, Mao Zedong's grandson suggested that the ideas of Mao were being misused by groups such as the Indian Maoists, who were invoking his image to wage violence against the state. In Mao Xinyu's opinion, Mao's ideas of "people's war" and violent struggle were less applicable in the postcolonial world. For more, see Ananth Krishnan, "India's Maoists Are Misusing Mao's Name," *The Hindu*, 11 March 2012: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article2982482.ece>



## The U.S.–Yemeni Joint Counterterrorism Exercises: The Other Side of the COIN

*MAJ Mohammed Garallah,  
Yemeni Army*

Arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern themselves.

— Secretary of Defense Robert Gates,  
26 November 2007<sup>1</sup>

AFTER THE BOMBING OF THE USS *COLE* IN THE PORT OF ADEN ON 12 October 2000, the Republic of Yemen became a potential ally of the United States in U.S. counterterrorism campaigns. To ensure the Yemeni government's ability to combat terrorism on its own soil and prevent such attacks from occurring again, the United States provided the Yemeni Special Forces with light equipment and engaged in a series of joint exercises with them. Today, "U.S. security assistance to Yemen is aimed at restoring stability and security to Yemen while building the capacity of the Yemeni government to combat the common threat of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)."<sup>2</sup>

People in both Yemen and the United States had very high expectations for the outcome of U.S.–Yemeni joint military training exercises.

People in both Yemen and the United States had very high expectations for the outcome of U.S.–Yemeni joint military training exercises. They assumed this training would both make the Yemeni SOF very effective at countering al Qaeda and help ensure the country's stability and security. Despite the tremendous effort and resources devoted to those exercises, however, the Yemeni SOF still lack the desired levels of proficiency and readiness for effective CT operations.

The SOF units, like the other Yemeni armed forces, still have no doctrine, no planning experience, and no real institutional structures in place. The way they conduct operations is similar to the way regular forces do. The training provided by the United States simply created a group of professional individuals commanded by a senior officer with a "general purpose" regular forces background. The purported goal of the training, to develop effective, sustainable SOF for Yemen, appears to be far beyond reach for the near future. For example, the Houthi rebels<sup>3</sup> in the northern part of the country were able to defeat the Yemeni government in six wars, while al Qaeda continues to get stronger in the south. Generally, those trained military units seem to vanish when they are needed for real missions.

How can we measure the effectiveness of this training, and what is wrong with the current U.S. approach?

Under these circumstances, I wonder how long it will take U.S. forces to train the Yemeni counterterrorism units. What will it take for their efforts to be successful? How can we measure the effectiveness of this training, and what is wrong with the current U.S. approach to training foreign militaries?

I will not try to answer these questions in this article because they require extensive research. I will, however, describe my personal experience with the U.S. training program in Yemen that took place from 2001 to 2002. As a young lieutenant during this training, I went through a life-changing experience.

Although the training was very effective and successful in my case, I think there is room for improvement if we look at it from the other side of the coin.

## Yemen's Special Forces: An Uncertain Beginning

After graduation from the Yemeni Military Academy in 2000, I was deployed to the Special Operations Forces unit along with 16 other officers. The SOF was established in 1999 in reaction to the escalation of terrorist activities in Yemen. As a new graduate, I was an inexperienced officer in a young, inexperienced unit. For almost a year, we were assigned to train enlisted soldiers in the way special forces should fight. I and my peers wondered what knowledge we could give those young men besides the troops' parade march, physical training, some technical knowledge, and punishment techniques. We were not ready to admit our lack of experience, however, so we moved forward, claiming to have all the knowledge in the world.

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Nearly a year after my deployment to the Yemeni SOF, an order came from the commander of the SOF and the Republican Guard to form what then was called a joint exercise battalion. The unit chief of staff announced, "This battalion will receive training from American experts."<sup>4</sup> Because it was the first time the Yemeni special forces would be trained by experts from such a great, knowledgeable, and strong country, the commander observed the establishment of this battalion closely and was directly involved in the process of selecting the officers, calling for the best soldiers to be picked up.

Of course, every officer wanted to be part of this training, but the decision was made to choose only the most expert, dedicated, and intelligent individuals from the two best battalions in the unit—the special forces battalion and the counterterrorism battalion. These two battalions alone, however, could not furnish the new battalion with the required number of officers and soldiers. To fill the requirement for manpower, the commander directed the best officers and soldiers from other battalions to join, and that is how I was picked up.

During the new battalion's establishment process, negotiations and discussions were going on between the Yemeni special forces command, the Yemeni national intelligence body, and the Americans. For us soldiers, everything was vague. All we knew was that we would be trained by American experts, which we hoped would give us some prestige for being part of it. All of the soldiers were eager either to get short leave or to resolve personal issues so that they could dedicate themselves fully to the training, which we understood would last a month or two, or maybe even three months.

For us soldiers, everything was vague. All we knew was that we would be trained by American experts, which we hoped would give us some prestige.

The joint exercise battalion consisted of two companies and a reconnaissance platoon, and each company was made up of three platoons. The platoons each had 12 soldiers, excluding the platoon leader and deputy. I was assigned as the second platoon leader in the second company. The deputy assigned to my platoon was one of my colleagues at the Yemeni Military Academy, a very smart and cooperative officer.

## Training

The first day of training was at the SOF training camp. Everybody was eager to see the American experts. How would they look? What would they say or do? What weapons would they show us? And more important, what could they give us? The battalion was at its full strength. Its officers were ready to follow

Everybody was eager to see the American experts. What weapons would they show us? And more important, what could they give us?

The expert team never gave us any details about their plans for these trainings. No one apparently considered the effect that keeping these details from us would have.

At this point, the fancy mental picture of Americans was gone. They needed to give us something new.

orders and so were the soldiers. The battalion commander was very active that day. However, he was not ready to join the training. His chief of staff was not ready to be trained either, so the training included only those at the company commander level and down.

The American experts utilized the first day of training to familiarize themselves with the Yemeni soldiers, and to test our level of training and our marksmanship. We were directed to start shooting at targets using different kinds of weapons. After this initial assessment, the American team introduced themselves to the companies and started to show us a better way to manage the light arms. The expert team never gave us any details about their plans for the type and length of these trainings, perhaps because this was not yet decided, or details were kept secret for security reasons, or the need for a schedule was just ignored. Whatever the reason, no one apparently considered the effect that keeping these details from us would have on our training if it took longer than we expected or planned for.

The training was set in phases. Phase one was movement techniques, patrol formations, and weapons alignment. Phase two included raids, ambush operations, and marksmanship. Phase three focused on building assault operations, night patrols, and hostage rescue. Phase four included air assault tactics in desert and mountain operations. The training plan and the end goal had the potential for success, but they were not communicated to the participants, who began the training expecting to do phase four first instead of last. As a result, the Yemeni soldiers and officers didn't accept the basic knowledge they were taught by the instructors in phase one. They wanted the type of knowledge they didn't already have.

When the first phase began, the soldiers started to complain. Some of them challenged the instructors, saying, can you do this or can you do that? They started to ask questions, like, what if this happened and what if that didn't happen? The soldiers weren't asking these questions because they wanted to know the answers, but because they wanted to prove that the Americans didn't know. Soldiers started to question the real reason behind why those trainers came all the way to Yemen just to show them how to walk and fire the arms they used every day. At this point, the fancy mental picture of Americans was gone. They needed to give us something new—maybe knowledge, equipment, or weapons—to be accepted again. The American team understood that they had to do something to raise the soldiers' morale, and a new weapon was the solution they thought of.

Two months after the training started, the instructors and battalion commander announced that our new weapons had been shipped and would arrive soon. The soldiers started to imagine these weapons, picturing the American Hollywood movies that showed Rambo holding a gun with lasers that could destroy a building with one shot. When the new weapons arrived, the excited soldiers were sadly disappointed. The weapons we received were used AK-47s—Russian machine guns—and RPGs that had been recovered from Afghanistan and poorly repainted so they would look good. The soldiers imagined a Ferrari, but their gift was a salvage car that came from the insurance company. Instead of raising the soldiers' morale, the arrival of the weapons lowered it even more.

Getting these undesirable weapons was a great excuse for the soldiers to be lazy, late, or absent. So whenever we were asked to start training, we would point to the weapons. Even if we messed up a tactical mission, the instructors got the response: The weapon is bad. The battalion commander started to lose control of his men. His promise of new and great weapons turned out to be false. The expert team faced this problem as well. Every morning before we started any training, as you can imagine, we would remind the American instructors that the weapons they had given us were bad and that we didn't like them. Even when the translators avoided conveying those complaints, we would hold the weapon up and make a gesture showing how much we hated it. The instructors did their best to help us align the weapon, adjust it, and make it work if it got stuck. That, however, didn't help them avoid our complaints.



A cache of British Enfield rifles, rocket propelled grenades, and other explosives, a rocket-launching system, military clothing, and equipment found near the village of Hind Dor, Afghanistan.

The bottom line was this: To raise morale and make things work, new weapons or equipment had to come. The exercise continued with the hope of receiving new weapons. As we were promised, just one month later, huge containers filled with equipment arrived at the unit. This new equipment consisted of almost everything we had hoped for—even more in some cases, although less in others. We were issued hand watches, night vision goggles, M16 assault rifles, and body armor and helmets. But most important were the Glock 19 pistols, the first Glock pistols to enter Yemen. Everyone's morale was now very high, and we were envied by those who hadn't joined the training. A new team of American trainers had also arrived to replace the first team, so the first American team didn't get to see our excitement.

The soldiers imagined a Ferrari, but their gift was a salvage car that came from the insurance company.

By the time the new weapons and equipment arrived, the training was in the advanced phases and had become more specialized. We were learning new techniques and utilizing new equipment and assets. During the later training phases, we learned how to be marksmen, how to raid and ambush, and how to fight. We trained in air assaults, raids, ambushes, rural and urban assaults, jungle and mountain assaults, and techniques to breach buildings. The more time that passed, the more advanced the training became.

Although the advanced training was very useful, the joint exercise battalion was not now up to its full strength. Some officers and soldiers were absent or had deserted the training for personal reasons. Some soldiers were replaced by new soldiers who hadn't attended the initial phases. So although the advanced training had arrived, it didn't really seem that way in the eyes of the officers and soldiers.

This new equipment consisted of almost everything we had hoped for—even more in some cases.

## Lessons Learned and Where There's Room for Improvement

In the foreword to the new U.S. Army field manual, FM 3-07.1, General Martin E. Dempsey, TRADOC commander, asserted that "security force assistance is no longer an 'additional duty.' It is now a core competency of our [U.S.] Army."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the training of foreign militaries is a core means of improving the United States' security as a whole. Understanding and learning



Although the training was very successful at lifting the soldiers from a certain level of expertise to the next level, it didn't even touch the commanders.

from previous experiences is key to the success of future training exercises. The U.S.–Yemeni joint exercise had many successful features and overall was very good. There are some aspects, however, that could be changed to make the training more successful, to maintain the knowledge and experience the soldiers absorbed, and to better achieve the training's goals.

Although the training was very successful at lifting the soldiers from a certain level of expertise to the next level, it didn't even touch the commanders who would be leading those newly trained soldiers. As I mentioned previously, the battalion commander and his deputy were not included in the training. Why? Because when the soldiers conduct missions, our commanders only watch! Or because they lead their soldiers during times of peace, but when war comes, somebody else who has been well trained takes over! The question of why the commanders weren't trained only came to my mind when I received advanced training in the United States following my participation in the U.S.–Yemeni program. It was then that I learned that commanders also need to be trained. They should be even more highly trained than their subordinates, not only in corruption and how to manipulate roles, but also in leading in battle and bringing soldiers back safely.

After a year or so, almost half of those soldiers who had participated in the training quit the service and went to be farmers or qat dealers.

The U.S.–Yemeni training program was not set up for long-term success. After the training was completed, the (untrained) Yemeni commanders didn't appreciate the importance of this SOF battalion or respect its initial purpose. The first thing they did was distribute those trained officers and soldiers back to their original battalions, effectively returning them to the condition they were in before the training. After a year or so, I learned that almost half of those soldiers who had participated in the training quit the service and went to be farmers or qat dealers.<sup>6</sup> Other soldiers were very disappointed in the eventual outcome of the training. Everybody started to forget what they had learned. The officers had one concrete benefit from their participation in the joint training: the Glock pistols that they got to keep. But the knowledge turned out to be not that important.

Unlike what we expected, the American instructors were very soft. They didn't punish, yell, or report those who arrived late to training or even those who were absent. Instead, they observed, took a deep breath, and continued their program. Maybe they thought that the battalion and company commanders were capable of making great soldiers and were doing their job. They should have asked themselves, if those commanders are really capable of doing their jobs, why would they need us Americans here in the first place? The American instructors seemed like politicians dealing with the soldiers. As a result, more soldiers were intentionally late and some started to question why they needed this type of training anyway.

As uninformed consumers, we were just like people in the dark waiting for a door to open to see the light behind it.

As uninformed consumers, we were just like people in the dark waiting for a door to open to see the light behind it. It wasn't just the junior officers and soldiers who were confused. Everybody was confused. Even the Yemeni Army leadership was not expert in discussing issues with the Americans and planning ahead. I believe even they thought, the Americans know what to do, so why discuss it? It was rumored that US \$50 million was given to the Yemeni government for this training, however, so we had expected a lot of new equipment, modern weapons, and very advanced training.

We were not briefed by our commandant or by the American experts about the type and purpose of the training. All we were told was to stay active



during the training, learn more, represent the country, and be on time. As I emphasized previously, the biggest concern of the Yemeni soldiers and officers was what type of weapons and equipment they would get out of the exercise and which ones they would get to keep.

The training program was carefully planned by the American side. They knew what they needed to do to make a unit better. They knew how long it would take to do the training, how many soldiers could be trained, what type of training area was necessary, and what their assignment was. What they didn't know, however, was exactly what type of soldiers they would find in the Yemeni trainees or what kinds of administrative issues the Yemeni soldiers faced. For example, they didn't know how the Yemeni military organizes and implements leave for soldiers, or how it punishes absence from training camp. The American experts also did not know how long most Yemeni soldiers expect to stay in one type of training without leave.

For example, long trainings can be problematic for Yemeni soldiers because a soldier's family does not come with him while he participates in training exercises. If a Yemeni soldier is from the southern part of the country but trains in the northern part of the country, then his family will stay in the south. Weekends are not long enough for him to visit his family. And even if they were, the salary a Yemeni soldier earns is not enough to cover visits home to his family more often than once every three to four months. And when a soldier is finally able to travel home, the familial issues he faces when he arrives after a long absence can sometimes require several weeks to deal with. The Yemeni government does not really take care of its soldiers and their families. If a Yemeni soldier or a member of his family is sick, they must go and suffer while waiting in the military hospital, begging military police dictators who guard the hospital to let them in so they can be seen by the doctor. For all these reasons, Yemeni commanders expect their soldiers to be late for training or even to desert a training assignment, especially if the exercise takes longer than soldiers expect.

The American contractors also didn't spend enough time learning to understand the Yemeni administrative system. The administrative system of any unit can determine either the success or failure of that unit in achieving the ultimate goal of the exercise. A Yemeni soldier or an officer has no future if the highest commander doesn't personally know him or his abilities. Because of this, he has to do his best to be known, or simply die unknown. Those soldiers who had been waiting for a chance to prove their effectiveness and their readiness to serve their country saw that chance arrive with the joint training exercise led by the American experts. Many of those Yemeni soldiers were working to demonstrate their effectiveness during training because they needed not only the American experts' knowledge and support, but also a recommendation from the trainers to the highest commander. This was how they could secure a future.

Repairing Yemen's administrative and institutional systems is necessary for the success of any future joint training exercises. In Yemen, we don't have FM 3-0—or any FM at all. Our doctrine is simply this: Do what I tell you. In Yemen, we don't have institutional leadership; we have individual leaders. In other words, the leader in Yemen is the system, and the leader is the unit. If he is good, then the unit moves forward. But when a new commander comes in, the unit starts all over again, from scratch. Training professional soldiers to

What [the Americans] didn't know was exactly what type of soldiers they would find in the Yemeni trainees.

Yemeni commanders expect their soldiers to be late for training or even to desert a training assignment.

Make it or break it. Either conduct a good, effective training program, or don't show up.

shoot without training the decision-makers who command those soldiers is just like making genuine parts for a vehicle that doesn't exist. Unfortunately, awareness of this reality was not in the American training experts' manual.

The training of foreign militaries would be more successful if the following guidelines were taken under consideration by the commands organizing such training programs:

1. Make it or break it. Either conduct a good, effective training program, or don't show up.
2. Train the commanders first. Planning is key.
3. From the beginning, inform those being trained about the whole training process, including the purpose and the goals of the training.
4. Implement a good selection process for choosing which officers and soldiers should be assigned to participate in the training.
5. Study extensively the customs, roles, and administrative issues of the units being trained.
6. Be prepared to adapt the training process should administrative issues affect the training.
7. Make sure that good officers are nominated by their units.
8. Support the active soldiers with any means necessary, and report the bad and lazy soldiers.
9. Be aggressive when the training requires it.
10. Be strict with those who are not obeying the rules.

For the Yemeni special forces, the U.S.–Yemeni joint exercise was not their only training, but was the beginning of a series of trainings. Yet the Yemeni special forces seemed to be marching in double time while going nowhere. Maybe someday I will see more than training. Maybe someday I'll see the training bring the desired outcomes. ❖

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MAJ Mohammed Garallah** serves in the Yemeni SOF command.

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#### NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

As Major Garallah points out, he is describing experiences from more than a decade ago. We at CTX like to think that sensibilities have changed—and will continue to change. Indeed, one aim of the *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, and of articles like Major Garallah's, is to tilt against cross-cultural misunderstandings before they occur, and to sensitize operators to better understand both themselves and those they are working with.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Security Force Assistance* (FM 3-07.1), May 2009: [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_22.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_22.pdf)
- 2 U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "U.S. Government Assistance to Yemen," posted 7 August 2012: <http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2012/08/196136.htm>
- 3 The Houthi rebellion is made up of Shi'a insurgents who have been fighting the central government in northern Yemen for nearly two decades. They take their name from Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, who was their commander until he was killed in September 2004.
- 4 Yemeni SOF COS forces briefing, Special Forces Base, Yemen, 2001.
- 5 Gary Sheftick, "New Field Manual Focuses on Training Foreign Force," Army News Service, 6 May 2009: <http://www.army.mil/article/20660/new-field-manual-focuses-on-training-foreign-forces/>
- 6 *Qat* is a tree with leaves that people in Yemen, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia chew for its stimulant effect. Qat leaves are considered a drug in the United States, but not in other countries like Germany and the United Kingdom.

## THE CTAP INTERVIEW

### MAJ Nils N. French, Canadian Army

THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKEN FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE COMBATING Terrorism Archive Project.<sup>1</sup> LTC Mike Richardson spoke on 25 February 2013 with MAJ Nils French, an Engineer officer in the Canadian Army, about some of his experiences while deployed in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, throughout most of 2009. During the interview, MAJ French provided several key insights on the topic of interoperability.

*Interviewed by LTC Mike Richardson*

MAJ French

CTAP: Good afternoon. This is LTC Mike Richardson for the Counter Terrorism Archive Project. I am interviewing Major Nils French, a Canadian Army Engineer. Major French, would you like to give a little bit of background on yourself?

FRENCH: Yes, like you said, I am a Canadian Army officer. I am right now at the Naval Postgraduate School completing a Master's of Science [degree] in the Defense Analysis Program. I have been here for a couple of months [and am] really enjoying it.

As far as my background, I went to the Royal Military College of Canada, [where I] studied [civil] engineering and graduated in 2002. I spent the next year doing training in New Brunswick, home of the Engineers, at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown. I went on to Valcartier, Quebec, where I served two years in an Engineer unit doing my troop command and squadron 2IC, or as you call it in the United States, company XO time. Then I went down to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, [where] I was on an exchange as an instructor [at] the U.S. Army Engineer School. I was teaching both lieutenants and captains for the various courses that they took at Fort Leonard Wood. That was from 2006 to 2008, so I spent two years in Fort Leonard Wood.

CTAP: Can you relate a little about your exchange post in the United States?

FRENCH: Yes, I was teaching classes almost day in and day out. If you look back, 2006 to 2008 was the time when the United States was surging heavily in Iraq, [as the fighting] reached its worst point. So it was a very, very busy time for the U.S. Army. Basically, any officer who was available back in the United States was being plucked out of whatever position they were in and sent off to theater.

So I was one of the very, very few officers—actually I was the only officer in my cell who could be counted on, not [for] any personal trait but just because I couldn't be pulled up and sent off to theater. I was there on exchange and that wouldn't have been permissible.



Engineers had a big role in terms of what the U.S. Army was doing. Fort Leonard Wood was the center [for] the Engineers. It was an interesting place to be.

So I was teaching a lot of classes, sometimes from 8:00 in the morning to 4:00 or 5:00 at night, continuously. There was a lot of evolution going on in terms of how to deal with improvised explosive devices in particular. Route clearance was really a new concept and the route clearance package was new, so I was learning a lot of this. I was taking any course that was available—well, any course that was taught at Fort Leonard Wood was open and available to me at the time. If I wasn't teaching, the policy of the [officer] I was working for was [that] I could go ahead and take [any] course because it would just make me a better instructor at the school. So it was a very busy time there. Engineers had a big role in terms of what the U.S. Army was doing [because of their roles in both IED mitigation and reconstruction]. The U.S. Army was at the center of what the United States was doing [in Iraq] at the time, and Fort Leonard Wood was the center [for] the Engineers. It was an interesting place to be. I learned a heck of a lot [about] the U.S. Army, the U.S. Engineers, how they functioned—[it was] total immersion.

CTAP: Was this your introduction to improvised explosive devices and the counter-improvised explosive device battle that had been going on since roughly the middle of 2003, 2004?



An Afghan National Army commando with the 3rd Commando Kandak carefully uncovers a buried simulated improvised explosive device (IED). The commandos underwent a week of training by coalition special operations forces in the identification and neutralization of IEDs.

FRENCH: I wouldn't say it was my introduction. I had covered some of the [basic material on the subject] in my earliest training. Canada [has] had some fairly close [military] ties to the UK for a long time, and a lot of the [lessons] that [were learned by British forces] in Northern Ireland [were], at least in part, coming into the Canadian training. [This was happening] well before 9/11, so even when I was going through my training in Gagetown, I was seeing some of it. However, I did learn a fair bit more about IEDs when I was at Fort Leonard Wood.

CTAP: How do the Canadian forces define what the United States saw as this very unique experience on the battlefield, which was this counter-IED fight. Did Canadian forces see it differently?

FRENCH: Not being an EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal] operator myself, I don't really have the greatest detail on it, but for decades the Canadian Army had been sending combat engineers and some folks from our logistics side to the United Kingdom to do technical munitions courses and counter-IED-type courses.

Probably because [the British] had expertise from Northern Ireland. As far as whether we were [seeing] this as a new thing, or we were looking at the United States, which was starting to grapple with it seemingly in a big way for the first time—I wouldn't really say we were looking at the United States and saying, "Hey, this isn't anything big." The Brits may have been doing that [more than us]. There were British exchange officers [at Fort Leonard Wood] as well, and they maybe felt a little more of that because [counter-IED operations were] definitely more second nature to them. For Canada, having not been in Northern Ireland, [despite the] many courses we may have taken with the British, I still don't think it was second nature for us in any way. So it really came to the forefront for us in much the same way that it would have been coming to the forefront for the United States. We may have had a greater proportion of the force [trained], perhaps. But it wasn't something that was second nature for us.

[F]or decades the Canadian Army had been sending combat engineers to the United Kingdom to do technical munitions courses and counter-IED-type courses.



CTAP: In talking to international officers and from just looking at the American historical military record, I have recognized that it is not an unusual occurrence to have booby traps and landmines and other devices [set by opposing forces].

FRENCH: I know the Canadian Army had some solid experience with booby traps, for example, and landmines as well, in the former Yugoslavia, during [the years it spent] there. Again, some of that training came over. Now, when I talk about IEDs, I make a mental differentiation between a booby trap and an IED. You can argue it, and you really have to get into some details to discuss the differences. But we might have had more exposure force-wide in the Canadian Army than the U.S. forces [had] because a critical mass of the Canadian Army's personnel, [especially on the engineering side], cycled through the Balkans and had that exposure to mines and booby traps. In the United States, I don't think there was a critical mass that cycled through the former Yugoslavia. There were definitely [U.S.] troops deployed in great numbers, certainly greater numbers than what Canada sent over to the Balkans; however, as a proportion of the total force, probably not as great.

The Canadian Army had some solid experience with booby traps, for example, and landmines as well, in the former Yugoslavia.

CTAP: That is a very interesting point. I hadn't thought about that connection with the Balkans.

FRENCH: Yes, it wasn't IEDs in the sense of a roadside bomb, as we think of them today. It was definitely booby traps, not so much intended to cause casualties, more intended to deny [access to] certain structures. Not having been to the Balkans, I might very well be incorrect, but my understanding is that [the use of improvised explosives had] a different intent, and maybe that is one of the things that differentiates [current conflicts from earlier ones involving the Canadian Army].

CTAP: That is a very interesting methodology to analyze the differences. So I want to get you back towards the direction you were going. After you completed your tour at the United States Army Engineering School, I understand you subsequently deployed to Afghanistan?

FRENCH: Yes.

CTAP: Would you talk a little bit about that experience, and what your role was during that deployment?

FRENCH: Yes. From Missouri [I drove] to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, which is [where] 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group is based. I was assigned to 1 Combat Engineer Regiment, then [was] promptly pulled out [to fill a position with] the Brigade Headquarters that was standing up Task Force 5-09, as it was called at the time. [Task Force 5-09 was] standing up to go to Afghanistan to take over the role of what we called Task Force Kandahar, which was the Canadian Brigade Headquarters commanding all Canadian forces we had in theater. I think I rolled across the Canadian border in August, and by [about] the last week of August I was already in the work-up training. We deployed in February 2009, and I was [in Afghanistan] until November of 2009. My job was the Task Force Engineer planner. So I was resident in the plans shop with our G5, who was in charge of all the tactical plans for the brigade; his assistant planner; our ISTAR (Intelligence,

My job was the Task Force Engineer Planner. So all the engineer aspects [on] the infrastructure side of things, that was coming into my lane.



One of our major roles was going to be to transition parts of Kandahar Province, in which our forces were spread very thin, over to U.S. forces.

Surveillance, Target, Acquisition, and Reconnaissance) planner; an intelligence plans officer; and an artillery/targeting plans officer. So all the engineer aspects [on] the infrastructure side of things, that was coming into my lane.

CTAP: So could you describe the situation in Kandahar when you completed all your training and arrived there in 2009?

FRENCH: In the orders that were provided to us from Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command, CEFCON, we knew that one of our major roles was going to be to transition parts of Kandahar Province, which is an absolutely massive province in which our forces were spread very thin, over to U.S. forces. So Canada had [what] I guess you could [call] a brigade-minus for the whole province, and by the time we left, there were probably three times that [many] forces present. [We had] the same number of Canadian forces, [but] a large addition of U.S. forces had come into theater. If you look at 2009 in general, that was [the start of] the “surge” for Afghanistan. That is when U.S. forces, in particular the Marines, started going heavily into Helmand Province and a lot of other locations, primarily in the south and southwest of Afghanistan. So RC South was getting most of the new troops.

Up to that point, there were more U.S. forces working in and around the Kandahar battle space than ever before, and [we had to prepare for] handing over major portions of the battlespace to U.S. forces. [The U.S. forces brought] a lot of those enablers like [tactical] helicopters, medevac, [EOD teams, and] there was a route clearance battalion that [operated] across [our AO]. [U.S. forces] not only surged into Kandahar Province through Kandahar Air Field, [they] moved [through Kandahar] out to Helmand, to build up in Helmand Province. So it was a very, very busy place and time for U.S. forces across the board.

CTAP: Who were the forces you worked with? Did you see any differences in the way they operated or the way you interacted with them?

FRENCH: There was quite a mix. [I’ll try] to detail who was in the battlespace and who we were interacting with at the time. It is probably a very little known fact that Brigade Headquarters, Task Force Kandahar, which I was a part of, had [at one] point in time multiple U.S. units [subordinate to its] command. The main one, if my memory serves me correctly, was the 2nd of the 2nd, an infantry battalion that first showed up and then transferred over to the 1st of the 12th [infantry battalion]. I don’t know much more of the background on forces right now in terms of what division they are a part of and so on, but there was an infantry battalion throughout the time that I was there, and we [Task Force Kandahar] were [issuing] orders and receiving reports from the field. [That] U.S. infantry battalion [was] reporting back up to us and receiving orders from us just like the Canadian battalion. Towards the latter end of our deployment, the [U.S.] 97th Military Police Company [also] was there [under Task Force Kandahar]. They had taken over a portion of Kandahar City [as mentors to the Afghan police force], positioned out of Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City.

Towards the end, there was the 4th of the 82nd, Task Force Fury, which was operating across the province. I wouldn’t say they [were] under [our] command—it was more of a coordinating-type relationship within the battlespace.

They were mentoring the Afghan National Army and I think, to a degree, some police as well. [The] command structure of Task Force Kandahar [is something] very few people know, a lot of Canadians probably don't even know [that Canadians commanded Americans]. I wouldn't be surprised if it is the first time in history that ever happened, but I could be wrong.<sup>2</sup>

There were a lot of [other U.S.] forces that were working in the battlespace, and from time to time [they] actually came under [our] command for certain operations, to facilitate what we were doing. Task Force Thor, the 4th Engineer Battalion, was running route clearance patrols all over Kandahar Province, and we were giving them our priorities and working with them continuously. Our EOD teams were disposing of devices that they were finding and again, [the relationship was] very, very close there. And of course, [Task Force Kandahar did much of] the planning that made that happen. Task Force Saber, a combat aviation [group] out of the 82nd Airborne Division, was operating across Kandahar Province as well. So [we did] a lot of close work with them, particularly with the IED fight and trying to detect devices and [interdict emplacers].

Very few people know, a lot of Canadians probably don't even know, [that Canadians commanded Americans].

There were also U.S. SOF who were operating in Kandahar Province, so there was all sorts of coordination there. There were U.S. EOD teams that came over to us from time to time for certain operations, so we would [make a] request if we needed some augmentation for a particularly demanding operation. There you would have the reverse [situation]: You would have a Canadian route-clearance patrol finding a device and a U.S. EOD team disposing [of it]. Later on, when we started the transition to U.S. forces as the surge came in, it was the 5th [Brigade] of the 2nd [Infantry Division], [a] Stryker Brigade Combat Team that came out of Fort Lewis, Washington. They came in with several battalions and took over the battlespace in the north and the south and in the west, bit by bit, as their forces reached sufficient strength to move out [into the AO].

CTAP: Can you talk a little bit about what the relationship was like? In particular, how do you think your U.S. exchange experience might have contributed to the relationships that you had, and not necessarily just you, but also your command, with the other American units coming through?



An Afghan soldier observes an OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopter approaching in the distance during a clearing operation in Khakrez district, Kandahar. Afghan soldiers partnered with multinational Special Operations Forces during the mission.

It got pretty complicated in that sense, figuring out what they were going to do, and how we could influence it so that it worked out best for everybody.

FRENCH: Right. Being in a headquarters, being a planner, [when] I think back, I think one of the big things on the Canadian side as Task Force Kandahar [was just] trying to figure out—I mean if you are talking about the handover—trying to figure out what was going on, when they were going to come in, how things were going with their force deployment. [5-2] Stryker had to bring all their equipment. All their equipment had to be moved from the U.S. and then all their troops had to be moved from the U.S. to Afghanistan, which is fairly involved. It is the middle of the surge and there are all sorts of other things going on at the same time, so these things don't always end up on schedule. So [we were] figuring out where they were in that progression, that sequence. Also, [we were] trying to figure out what they had in mind, where they wanted [their bases]. If we had a certain forward operating base established somewhere or a patrol base established somewhere, were they going to take that over? Did they want to take that over? What were we going to leave behind [for them]? What did they want to purchase from us?<sup>3</sup> It got pretty complicated in that sense, figuring out what they were going to do and how we were going to best support that, and how we could influence it so that it worked out best for everybody.

[The incoming U.S. forces] had a lot of RFIs [requests for information]. We were the force in theater; we knew what was going on. We could respond to [their requests], getting them geospatial data, even just the most basic of maps [and other data]—providing all that stuff to that incoming BCT was a big part of what was going on. A lot of those relationships [you asked about] existed for that. We [were] a Canadian headquarters, but this was a U.S. force coming in, so the mechanisms that they were going through, the terminology, the procedures, the funding brackets that they were talking about [were completely different]. You know, just one slide [or talk] could have 20 different acronyms, [and having] even just [an] acronym explained—it would be the same for us, but having just that acronym explained wouldn't be sufficient [to understand]. [They were] talking about “title whatever” funds<sup>4</sup> and that had to be deciphered for it to be of any use to us. That is where I ended up coming in. Because I had taken courses that told me what time-phase force deployment [data] is, I understood [most of] that and I knew how it worked. I understood what a “Red Horse Unit” was,<sup>5</sup> so I was able to make that translation.

Even the simplest terms, you know, the kind of slang that goes around the table. Someone on the U.S. side could say “commo,” and maybe that wouldn't be picked up in a loud meeting room and understood by the Canadian person who was there. Having been at Fort Leonard Wood I was able, for the most part, [to] catch every detail that was coming through. It was almost like being

U.S. Special Operations team members with Special Operations Task Force—South board two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters following a clearing operation in Panjwai district, Kandahar.



an interpreter, to a degree. So [at] these meetings at Regional Command South, all the different forces, every branch of the U.S. Services, would brief to what was going on and where they were moving forces through and what was coming up. I was sitting in on those [briefings] and bringing the information back to Task Force Kandahar, and more or less making it make sense for us so that we could plan and adjust accordingly, and [then I would] go back [to] influence [U.S. plans] from time to time. So that was a big part of it. Especially from when 5-2 Stryker came in and took [portions of the AO] over from us, and also when we had other forces moving out further to points west in the battlespace. [That] was also a very, very collaborative process. [For an example of the importance of this coordination] I knew pretty much every lieutenant who was in [the U.S.] 4th Engineering Battalion because I trained them [at Fort Leonard Wood]. So I was running into [and working with] these guys all the time.

CTAP: Oh, yes.

FRENCH: I had so many students when I was at Fort Leonard Wood—I mean, [almost] 2,000 different students came through [the courses I taught].

CTAP: Wow.

FRENCH: I really didn't recognize them [when I ran into them], but they sat and listened to me [teach] sometimes [five to] eight hours a day, so they really had no difficulty recognizing who I was, and I definitely stood out when I was there because I was in a completely different uniform. So I was running into [former students] fairly often, and just from knowing them and having a good background there [at Fort Leonard Wood], that [sense of familiarity] spread to that whole battalion, I would say. I was able to just kind of roll in any time and talk to that battalion commander [if something important came up]. Task Force Thor, the [U.S.] 4th Engineer Battalion, was based out of Kandahar Air Field [and] we were in Kandahar Air Field, so that really helped [too]. But I think some of that familiarity influenced the efficiencies, the degree to which we were able to work [closely with] them. [It was] the same thing with Task Force Saber. Again, a very close working relationship. [They were] able to make sure we were using the resources that came to us properly and requesting the right [capabilities] that were required for certain missions. That was good in a lot of ways.

CTAP: Were there any complexities that cropped up? I'm just curious because I am a student of military culture. Were there any disconnects between the U.S. and the Canadian forces' cultures?

FRENCH: Ha, yes, there were. There was a tendency [on the part of incoming units to sometimes bypass Task Force Kandahar], the force in place. For example, [when] Task Force Fury [came] into our battlespace, it shouldn't normally work this way, at least in my view, but we had to go actively seek them and constantly be on top of them for information in terms of what they [had planned]. I am sure [it was just] eagerness and "I just want to get the job done," and, you know, managing a whole bunch of requirements all at once and not necessarily being able to check every box. But there were times when they would show up at one of our forward operating bases in a Black Hawk helicopter, and we had no idea that they were going out there.

It was almost like being an interpreter, to a degree.

I think some of that familiarity influenced the efficiencies, the degree to which we were able to work [closely with] them.

[The Americans] would show up at one of our forward operating bases in a Black Hawk helicopter, and we had no idea that they were going out there.



Somebody [always] is going to say, “Oh, I don’t want the base there, I want it here.” We rolled with it.

They were doing some kind of an infrastructure survey, picking out what bed spaces they were going to take. It caught [our] people completely by surprise. So rather than them coming to us and giving us the information in terms of [where they were going and when], we really had to keep on top of them and see what they were up to. That was maybe the one cultural thing that was the most interesting.

Then you can add on to that—[although] I don’t think it has anything to do with the U.S./Canada piece—when one force takes over from another, somebody [always] is going to say, “Oh, I don’t want the base there, I want it here. I am going to close that one and open this one.” There is always going to be a little bit of that. There was some of that, which is normal. It is just based on the different tactical assessments and sometimes based on the changing situation on the ground. So there was some of that. You know, I do remember being asked [when the Black Hawk came in], “Did you know anything about this?” And I didn’t know anything about it. I didn’t know they flew into FOB whatever and were already picking out where they were going to sleep. Some of that happened. We rolled with it.

CTAP: Well, being an alumnus of the 82nd Airborne Division, I was always taught that little groups of paratroopers or “LGOPs” as we like to call them, were what saves the day, so we made that a part of every moment of the time we were awake as paratroopers running around.

FRENCH: Yes, LGOPs is actually one of the terms I learned during my time in theater.

CTAP: Oh, excellent. Excellent.

I was actually producing [something] like a glossary. I had a whole bunch of U.S. terms on there, that [I] then translated into Canadian.

FRENCH: Yes, I was actually producing [something] like a glossary. I had a whole bunch of U.S. terms on there, like a big glossary that [I] then translated into Canadian. I don’t even know how many copies of these things I gave out. When you are in a meeting and you start talking about “the Beltway” [around Washington, D.C.], you know, little terms [like] that are completely different from one force to the next [and] can completely throw you off. So it is important to get those details. So pretty soon I had this glossary and I gave out tons of copies, and that kind of thing improves interoperability. It is a [different] language.

CTAP: Do you have any closing comments? Anything you would like to finish up with?

FRENCH: I think the one thing that I want to highlight, and hopefully it has come out already, [is that] the exchange program doesn’t really cost extra [personnel], because for every Canadian officer who was sent down to the U.S. Army Engineers School, there was a U.S. officer who was sent up to the Canadian School of Military Engineering. Maybe the only cost is a little more complicated administration as you work out visas between the countries, and the [relocation is] maybe for a bit of a longer distance. But the cost is really minimal when you look at an exchange program like the one I did at Fort Leonard Wood, and the payoffs are big. The payoffs really are.



[The exchange program is] a really valuable thing, because it wasn't just myself who was in Task Force Kandahar Headquarters who had previously been [posted] to the United States. I don't know if it was a coincidence, or if it was some genius on the part of the commander; it very well may have been. But there were, I think, three or four of us in the headquarters who had just come out of U.S. exchange programs. I had been doing the job I talked about, and these guys were doing liaison jobs. One guy was liaison with the Stryker Brigade Combat Team and another one was going out on operations with the [U.S.] infantry battalion reporting back up to Task Force Kandahar. You know, all very, very key positions making sure that interoperability was there, and truly it was an international brigade. We never called it that, but it really was. I think that having some people who have that kind of cross-cultural, if you will, that "bilingual" background can go a long way in enabling [interoperability]. Rather than worrying about little details and trying to figure out what each other is thinking and doing, [you can just get] down to business and deal with the problems that you are sent there to deal with in the first place.

[Liaisons were] very key positions making sure that interoperability was there, and truly it was an international brigade. We never called it that, but it really was.

CTAP: That is a really valuable message. Thanks very much. ❖

## CTAP INTERVIEWEE

MAJ Nils N. French is an Engineer officer with the Canadian Army.

## NOTES

- 1 This interview has been edited for length and clarity. Every effort has been made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants has not been altered in any way. The original interview is available on video to CTFP members at [www.globalecco.org/archives](http://www.globalecco.org/archives)
- 2 MAJ French noted later that the First Special Service Force in World War II might be the only similar case.
- 3 In a subsequent discussion, MAJ French pointed out that Canadian governmental policy determined what could be given to the incoming U.S. forces, what had to be paid for by them, and what was absolutely essential for the Canadian forces to take back with them.
- 4 This refers to the U.S. Code regulation and funding system. Specifically, the funds MAJ French refers to were Title 10—Armed Forces and Title 22—Foreign Relations and Intercourse.
- 5 Acronym for a Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron.

Captain (now Major) Nils French shakes hands with U.S. Army Engineer School Commandant Brigadier General (now Major General) Gregg Martin upon completion of his posting at Fort Leonard Wood in August, 2008.



## ETHICS AND INSIGHTS

### How Can Leaders Maintain Ethical Command Climates?

*Dr. Rebecca J. Johnson*

**Dr. Rebecca J. Johnson** is an associate professor of National Security Affairs in the Command and Staff College, U.S. Marine Corps University

Command climate is the ethos of a unit, set by its commander.

If the definition of integrity is consistency in what a person says, does, and believes, then command climates stand or fall on integrity.

THE FIELD GRADE OFFICERS I TEACH OFTEN ASK HOW THEY CAN SET AND maintain ethical command climates in their specialized small units, especially when they are operating far from the flagpole, and for long periods of time. Leaders can find this aspect of command difficult even when they have eyes on their people daily and maintain good contact with “higher”; without these factors leaders can struggle, for predictable reasons.

What is “command climate”? General John Loh notes, “The essence of command and leadership is to create a climate throughout the unit that inspires all to achieve extraordinary goals and levels of performance at all times and under all conditions, especially in the stress of combat.”<sup>1</sup> Seen in this way, command climate is the ethos of a unit, set by its commander.

When it is strong, command climate orients subordinates and enables them to excel in achieving their mission. When it is weak (and most people reading this column can think of at least one former leader who seemed “asleep at the switch” during most, if not all, of his command tour), the environment is ripe for the subordinate with the strongest personality to step up and influence the unit. If the informal leader is committed to the unit’s mission and understands higher’s intent, the unit may flourish. If the informal leader’s intent for the unit deviates from that of the command or higher, the unit can very quickly find itself on dangerous ground. Finally, when the command climate is toxic (and many of us have been there, too), it orients and prepares subordinates to fail by stifling initiative, communication, and accountability.

On this point, let me be clear: Command climate encompasses more than morale. The commander’s ethos sets expectations about subordinates’ behavior. Does the commander enforce discipline? Demand integrity? Supervise? It is also more than command philosophy. If the definition of integrity is consistency in what a person says, does, and believes, then command climates stand or fall on integrity. A commander who articulates one set of expectations to the unit but then enforces different expectations through his own actions is setting his unit up for failure. As span of control increases, so does the challenge of maintaining integrity throughout the chain of command, especially as units specialize.

If we think about ethics as being those ideas and actions that maintain the standards of a profession (here, the profession of arms), then we can see pretty quickly how command climates influence the ethical character of a unit. Through their command climates, leaders can instill and enforce a unit-wide commitment to tactical proficiency, excellence, and growth while upholding professional standards, or they can undermine these commitments and, by doing so, undermine the standards of the profession.

Paul Bartone, a researcher at National Defense University, has shown that “hardy” leaders—those individuals who model commitment to the unit and mission, a sense of control over their choices and actions, and who view adversity as a challenge on the road to growth—tend to have hardy subordinates.<sup>2</sup> Leaders who have low levels of commitment, control, and challenge (those commanders who are either asleep at the switch or toxic) tend to have subordinates who admit to feeling alienated, powerless, and threatened. Under such conditions, ethics erode and unit members have little motivation to “do the right thing,” especially when the right thing comes at a personal cost.

Leaders who have low levels of commitment, control, and challenge tend to have subordinates who [feel] alienated, powerless, and threatened.

In small units, the dangers of a weak or toxic command climate are even higher. Two trends can combine at the small-unit level to erode effective and ethical command climates: 1) The strength of small unit bonds can create a parallel set of ethical expectations that may not comport with those of the larger organization (unit cohesion goes too far); and 2) younger members of small units become disproportionately influenced by their peers, thus turning the unit into a moral and ethical echo chamber. This may be acceptable in units with strong formal or informal leaders who set and maintain ethical command climates, but it can be disastrous in weak or toxic environments.

It is important to note that while leaders are responsible for and have a high level of influence over the actions of their subordinates, they rarely possess complete control over what subordinates do. Ethical lapses in a unit may tie back to a poor command climate, or they may tie back to a strong command climate that happens to be home to one or more deadweights. The existence of these ethical outliers underscores the importance of good command climates in units: strong commands can, if not change the behavior of deadweights, at least mitigate their effects; limit their influence on impressionable unit members; and hold them accountable more credibly than weak or toxic commands.

So what does all this mean for building an ethical command climate in small units that operate with high levels of autonomy? It means that the leaders of these units and their immediate superiors—officer, enlisted, and civilian—have a particular set of responsibilities. Some of these are obvious, but bear repeating. Others may be intuitive for only the most natural leader.

Unethical behavior [can develop] when soldiers interpret leaders' failure to stop such behavior as a tacit endorsement.

First, clearly communicated expectations are key. There are any number of instances in which leaders' failure to communicate clear expectations for their soldiers fed uncertainty, which led to a weak command climate in which soldiers felt alienated from higher, powerless to make effective decisions, and threatened by their situation. A weak command climate can motivate unethical behavior when soldiers interpret leaders' failure to stop such behavior as a tacit endorsement.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone is familiar with the amplification of Commanders' Intent down the chain of command. This natural desire to over-fulfill expectations can bring humorous results (Sergeant Major said to report 15 minutes ahead of the Battalion Commander's arrival, so the Gunny told his people to show up 30 minutes early. ...Folks were on the parade field an hour ahead of the Commander) or dangerous misunderstandings. The more consistently leaders communicate their expectations, through both deeds and words, the better

The key is to maintain strong cohesion within the unit, so that geographic or tactical isolation does not translate into alienation.

units will be prepared to fulfill higher's intent, even when they are operating at a distance from the command.

Second, command climate is a living thing; it is either growing stronger or it is growing weaker. Leaders need to focus on building their subordinates' ability to operate effectively and ethically under increasing distance, duration, and distraction. Some small units are intuitively more independent and can operate well far from base. The key is to maintain strong cohesion within the unit, so that geographic or tactical isolation does not translate into alienation. Other units function well closer to home, but struggle when they are more remotely deployed. Here the key is to build confidence and competence in unit members from the beginning, so they feel appropriately in control and capable (vice powerless or threatened) when facing more austere assignments.

Likewise, some units can take one set of mission-type orders and operate and adapt for weeks, while others require more frequent contact to reinforce intent. Leaders can help grow the second kind of unit by allowing increasing time between battlefield circulations (assuming the unit is operating effectively and ethically in the interim), rewarding initiative (even when it results in failure), and providing appropriate reachback so when the unit touches base, it receives the support it needs.

Finally, some units thrive on chaos, while others struggle to compartmentalize distractions. In these situations, reducing distance and duration to the extent possible can help refocus the unit. In addition, reachback is key to providing these units the support they need to focus on their mission, rather than on personal or other indirect concerns.

Some units thrive on chaos, while others struggle to compartmentalize distractions.

The command climate is about setting, modeling, and enforcing expectations for effective, ethical behavior by developing units' levels of commitment, control, and challenge over increasing distance, duration, and distraction. While these observations may seem obvious to the readers of *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, you may not have to travel too far down your chain of command to find leaders for whom this is not intuitive. Preparing them to build effective and ethical command climates all the way down to the smallest unit in your organization can't guarantee unit or mission success, but it will substantially improve the odds. ❖

## NOTES

- 1 General John Michael Loh, "The Responsibility of Leadership in Command," 1: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/au-24/loh.pdf>
- 2 Paul T. Bartone, "Resilience Under Military Operational Stress: Can Leaders Influence Hardiness?" *Military Psychology* 18 Supplemental (2 July 2006): S131–S148: <http://www.hardiness-resilience.com/docs/Bartone.pdf>
- 3 An extreme example of this negative feedback loop is the abuse carried out by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. See the Taguba Report: *AR 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade*, (declassified 15 October 2004), 19.

## THE MOVING IMAGE

### Zero F\*&%#!@G Thirty

IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT JOINING THE CENTRAL F\*&%#!@G INTELLIGENCE Agency as a f\*&%#!@g analyst, to make big f\*&%#!@g things happen, take a few tips from the motion picture *Zero Dark Thirty*. If stomping your feet and making pouty faces doesn't get you what you want, threaten your boss with a congressional investigation—a sure route to promotion. Dabble in torture. Use your personal cell phone to share classified information, and use secure communications to chit-chat with pals. Motivate yourself by seeking personal revenge; this provides more meaning and focus than the abstract notion of service to your country. Incidentally, Navy SEALs are quite willing to kill people for you, if you act angry-yet-confident. And especially remember to call yourself a motherf\*&%#!r when meeting the director of Central Intelligence, and say f\*&k a lot, so people will know you're serious.

The real Central Intelligence Agency is coolly mundane compared to the *Zero Dark Thirty* version. Serving intelligence officers do not use profanity or raise their voices in formal meetings. Such outbursts would be considered indisciplined and unprofessional. Strict adherence to process and procedure is essential to maintain security, protect classified information, and produce the best possible estimates and intelligence.

In fact, the sharpest criticism that can be made of an intelligence officer is to say that he or she is “emotional.” If their emotions are not in check, their reasoning could be distorted and their work become unreliable. Life-and-death decisions are made on the basis of intelligence produced by analysts. Any hint of unreliability cannot be allowed, which is to say, an emotional analyst cannot be tolerated.

None of this, however, makes for exciting on-screen drama. *Zero Dark Thirty* scriptwriter Mark Boal and director Kathryn Bigelow therefore took full advantage of the film's disclaimer that the events it portrays may be “fictionalized or invented for purposes of dramatization.” The film begins with the classic action-movie tag, “based on actual events.” This might lead the viewer to believe this is a docu-drama, like *Black Hawk Down* or *Battle of Algiers*. Yes, there is a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and yes, there was a terrorist named Osama bin Laden. Not much else is documentary. Most of the events we see on-screen are, as the disclaimer admits, “invented” and the characters “fictionalized.”

The contradictions and misrepresentations “for purposes of dramatization” are numerous. One of the more painful has the CIA chief of station strolling through the lobby of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad with a poker-chip sized “CIA” pin on his lapel, but displaying chagrin when his “cover” is blown by Wikileaks. In another, the CIA torturer-interrogator amateurishly mixes techniques—“friendly approach” this moment, “futility” the next, with some

by Kaley I. Sepp

**Dr. Kaley Sepp** is a senior lecturer in Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School.



Directed by Kathryn Bigelow.  
Columbia Studios, 2012. 157 minutes.

Say f\*&k a lot, so people  
will know you're serious.



Even *007* movies usually pay more attention to continuity and realism.

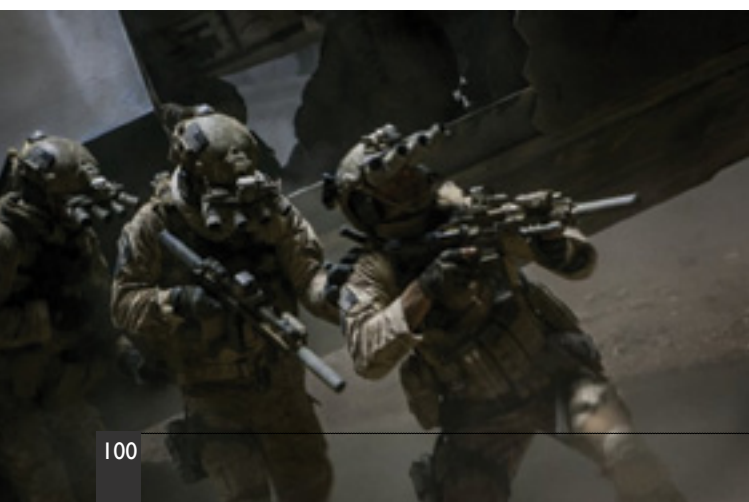
juvenile, Abu Ghraib-inspired sexual humiliation and dog-collaring thrown in. Then, he interviews his subject outdoors, where other prisoners can easily see and hear them. Finally, during the climactic raid on the bin Laden compound—which is a relief from the plodding mash of office scenes—the actual SEAL raiders had cut the electricity to the compound. But during “site exploitation,” in order to carry away bin Laden’s computers and documents, a SEAL simply flips a wall switch and turns on the house lights. Even *007* movies usually pay more attention to continuity and realism.

The two worst of these cinematic inventions, though, are the movie’s depictions of the effort to find Osama bin Laden, and of the real CIA officer Jennifer Matthews. In the film, a visiting bureaucrat screams at the shame-faced Islamabad station staff that they are, indeed, the only ones searching for bin Laden, and they had better get about finding him. The storyline reveals that only the red-haired analyst “Maya” is actually pushing the staff and her boss to take any meaningful action. If not for her pluck and courage,

Instead of the dedicated professional she was, Matthews is cast as a soccer mom.



the screenplay implies, bin Laden would never be found ... notwithstanding that the National Security Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Joint Special Operations Command, and an entire directorate at the CIA were wholly committed for almost a decade to the most extensive manhunt in U.S. history. The success of this world-wide effort was a triumph of cooperation and coordination inside the American and allied intelligence communities, and credit goes to thousands—not to one.



Jennifer Matthews was one of the most highly regarded and experienced CIA officers hunting bin Laden. Her killing, with seven others, by the suicide bomber and double-agent al-Balawi on 30 December 2009, was a serious setback to the manhunt. Her portrayal in *Zero Dark Thirty* as the gossipy and unserious “Jessica” is demeaning. Instead of the dedicated professional she was, Matthews (perhaps to enhance the Maya character) is cast as a soccer mom—baking a cake for her meeting with al-Balawi, bouncing on her toes when he arrives, and disregarding the security safeguards that might have prevented her death.

It's dramatic. It's emotive. It's wrong. One wonders what her three children would think if they saw this.

Counterterrorism and military professionals will not be surprised at the distance between *Zero Dark Thirty* and reality. In *Hurt Locker*, their earlier Oscar-winning collaboration, Boal and Bigelow similarly created characters and situations unrecognizable to anyone who actually served in Explosive Ordnance Disposal units in the Iraq war. Further, the well-tried plot of "lone idealist perseveres against incompetent superiors to bring villain to justice" is unconvincing in this case, despite Boal's imaginative scripting—or perhaps because of it.

Getting it right doesn't really matter in *Zero Dark Thirty*.

Even in the credits at the end of the movie, the name of the commander of the raid, Admiral William McRaven, is misspelled ("McCraven"). But getting it right doesn't really matter in *Zero Dark Thirty*. Better to stay home and read Nicholas Schmidle's "Getting Bin Laden," in the 8 August 2011 *New Yorker*. The whole story of the long hunt for Osama bin Laden is yet to be told, but *Zero Dark Thirty* is not a place to start. ♦



## STATE OF THE ART

## Painting Guerrillas or Guerrilla Painting?

*LT Edval Zoto, Albanian Army*

**LT Edval Zoto**, Albanian Army, is a student at the Naval Postgraduate School.

What meaning does [Vryzakis' painting] have for a book that, according to the author, is about "telling the story of irregular warfare from its origins"?

Boot tries but does not succeed in giving a proper definition of guerilla warfare.

MILITARY HISTORIAN MAX BOOT STARTED AND ENDED HIS PRESENTATION at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School by showing a widescreen image of the cover of his book, *Invisible Armies*.<sup>1</sup> The cover reproduces a colorful painting by the most famous painter of the Greek Revolution, Theodoros Vryzakis (1814–1878), titled "The Destruction of Dramali at Dervenakia." It depicts an epic battle in which a dozen men and women are shown fighting courageously atop a hill, surrounded by enemies. This battle occurred in 1822, a central year for the Greek revolutionary struggle for independence. Of course, the painting is a product of the imagination of Vryzakis, since at the age of eight he would have not been able to capture that image with his own eyes. But he had strong emotions about that period of time, having lost his father during the Revolution. The painting is a fine piece of art that makes the book look very handsome and interesting, but apart from aesthetics, what meaning does it have for a book that, according to the author, is about "telling the story of irregular warfare from its origins" (p. xxi)?

After listening to Dr. Boot's presentation on the book, I argued with the author about the picture's meaning, observing that to my knowledge it didn't represent a story of true guerilla warfare. Of course, the author's opinion on that is clear enough! In the end, both of us were wrong. The reason lies in finding a proper definition of the kind of warfare we were discussing.

For my part, I was right because the story behind the painting, the real Battle of Dervenakia, cannot be considered a guerrilla, an irregular, or a non-conventional battle. Boot, in the introduction to the book, tries but does not succeed in giving a proper definition of guerilla warfare. He writes that guerilla warfare is characterized by "the use of hit-and-run tactics by an armed group directed primarily against a government and its security forces for political or religious reasons" (p. xxii), while guerilla armies are distinguished from regular forces by their organizational structure (p. xxi). Also, according to the author, guerillas "rely on ambushes and rapid movements" (p. xxii), "undertake the strategy of attrition, trying to wear down the enemy's will to fight," and "wage war from the shadows" (p. xxiv).

If we analyze the Battle of Dervenakia, or the Greek Revolution, or any of the revolutions that aimed to obtain independence from the Ottoman Empire during its five centuries of dominance over the Balkans, it is hard to decide who is the guerrilla. In the case of Dervenakia, Mahmud Dramali Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman forces, was himself sent with his troops to hit, destroy, or disband the Greek forces, who had started their anti-imperial struggle inspired by a former Ottoman governor. (This man had risen against the sultan, only to then run back to his own safe possessions.) The concept of government was very fluid, and imperial governance was effective only in the cities and villages located in the plains of the Balkan Peninsula. The counterrevolutionary practice of the Ottoman Empire was primarily an endeavor to find



the most capable subordinate, who would gather his most capable troops and march them wherever they were needed to suppress a rebellion. On their return route, the troops were then allowed to expropriate the goods of the defeated populations. Other than that, the suppressing force had no pre-established organization. Dramali himself “contracted” with 1000 local Muslims to support him during the fighting or act as scouts to explore the trails.

Given their organization and objectives, the opposing forces in this fight did not differ much from each other.

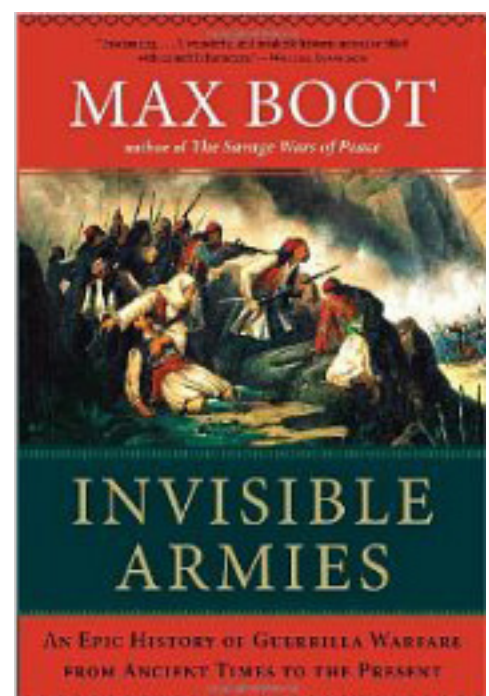
From the other side comes the same story. Theodoros Kolokotronis, the Greek commander, was largely independent from the “higher council of the war” and so were his “captains,” leaders of men who were paid with war booty. Given their organization and objectives, the opposing forces in this fight, or at least the substantial part of them, did not differ much from each other. Their tactics also were similar. On his punitive adventure, Dramali moved fast enough to defeat any resisting enemies, and held territory only when he believed his opponents’ will to fight was draining. The same tactics were embraced by the Greek forces. Most important, none of the above strategies or ways to conduct warfare was considered non-conventional by the participants. Centuries of rebellions had made the Ottoman forces aware of the “shadows,” and they knew what the battles would look like, while the rebels had adopted those techniques as the most rational ones given the hard terrain and communication routes. Nor were the battles themselves “guerillas” in their Spanish meaning of small wars, as Boot explains in his book. The Battle of Dervenakia, the one that brought the defeat of the Ottomans, lasted for three days (26–28 July 1822). The Greek revolution itself lasted six years, from 1821 to 1827.



But Boot was not wrong either, in defining the battle as an episode of guerilla warfare or even for characterizing the Greek Revolution as an example of a successful guerrilla campaign. The problem here does not lie with the Battle of Dervenakia or the Greek Revolution, but with the lack of a clear and fully representative definition of guerilla warfare. Boot doesn’t provide the reader with that. His book offers an extensive collection of examples, each different from the other and explained in an original way by the author. From this perspective, even Vryzakis’s picture makes sense. The artist’s view of the battle is different from the story behind it, but he chose to paint it as a short, decisive, and epic battle—an image quite attractive to Boot as well. What should have distinguished one from the other is precisely their approach to myth-making when presenting their works to the public: the epic painter may make his image ambiguous, while the historian cannot—or should not. This difference between the reality of the battle and the image of it offered on the book’s cover is what truly distinguishes guerilla warfare from traditional warfare. ❖

## NOTES

- 1 Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright, 2013). Dr. Boot spoke at the Naval Postgraduate School on 28 February 2013.





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